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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 391. FOR WEEK ENDING JUNE 27TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

1896 PROCLAMATION.

Grand Pioneer Reduction Sale

By Messrs. F. HODGSON & SON, The Well-known Carpet Manufacturers of the City of Leeds, will take effect on sight of this advertisement.

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	Each.		Each.
6ft. by 9ft., Reduced Sale Price	4/9	9ft. by 15ft., Reduced Sale Price	12/6
7½ft. by 9ft. " " "	5/11.	12ft. by 12ft. " " "	12/9
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8ft. by 12ft. " " "	9/6	12ft. by 18ft. " " "	19/6
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The Dowr. Lady Abercromby is pleased with the 'Prudential' Carpet she ordered."
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No. 26
June 27, 1896.
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No. 391.—One Penny. June 27, 1896.

SHORT STORIES

A STORY OF THE GOLDEN HORN.

Winter in Constantinople wears, for the most part, anything but a smiling face. It has nothing of the splendour of a northern climate, and lacks altogether the exalted stillness of snow-covered fields, creamy hills, and deeply-buried forests. It has the character of an abortive spring that can scarcely resist the temptation to relapse into wet winter. But there are occasional intervals, during which a mild blue firmament covers the residence of the sultans, the minarets and mosque-domes glitter and sparkle, and the waters of the Golden Horn ripple lovingly at the feet of evergreen hills, reflecting with dazzling effect the lovely blue overhead.

It was such a day, in the middle of December, 1879, while lounging in the reading-room of the German Club at Pera, that I met a former acquaintance, a young physician of whom I had for some time lost sight, though I knew that he had not left Constantinople.

Dr. Otto Franzeen was an interesting man. Tall and slender of stature, his rosy face was remarkable for a pair of large, calm brown eyes that contrasted surprisingly with his light blonde hair and golden blonde beard. But what characterised the man was the mystic calm of his manner and the paucity of his words. He spoke but little, went about alone, and his social relations with the foreign residents of the capital of the Ottoman Empire were as limited as courtesy would permit.

I saw him first in the reading-room in Pera, which he frequented, and we entered into conversation. The talk rambled through a variety of topics, but presently it became more personal.

"It is singular," he continued, after we had exchanged a few confidences, "that people here look on a man as though he were a child. They would guide each of my steps, and would absolutely lead me in the path to fortune and happiness. I am under surveillance by day and by night, and I believe the colony enters all my movements in a ledger. In this respect the Turks are different," he continued, after a few seconds; "they call for my services; but as soon as I am out of their houses I am dead as far as they are concerned."

"Then you also have practice among the Mohammedans?" I asked, somewhat surprised, knowing that foreign doctors are only called to attend Turkish families in very exceptional cases, and then generally only very old men, and such as have lived in Constantinople many years and are married.

"Yes," he replied, "I have more calls to Turks than to others. My practice is extending with the former."

"No doubt a paying practice?" I ventured.

"Very, but difficult," he replied, in his uncommunicative manner; "the women I am expected to treat when covered by the veil, and that is impossible. I declare my inability to help them under such circumstances, and that is generally effective. With groans and sighs the veil is removed, and what it had hidden would, in most cases, better have remained covered."

"In most cases, but not in all?" I interrupted.

"No, not in all," he said pensively; "for the greatest beauty here I saw unveiled. She was a slave," he added, and into his eyes there came a peculiar light.

He fixed his eyes thoughtfully on the ground, and his slender, nervous hand played excitedly with a paper-cutter. The expression of his face had suddenly become so singular that I felt a great desire to hear more of that slave girl. But from this time he relapsed into his wonted thoughtful silence.

After that meeting, weeks passed without my seeing the singular man again. Then we met again on several occasions, but I took care not to put any questions to him, or to exhibit a desire to learn anything he did not volunteer to impart, and by degrees we became excellent acquaintances.

One day Dr. Franzeen asked me whether I knew where he could obtain a Spinoza translated into German. I happened to have the volume he needed, and gave him the book. After a few days he confided to me that the book was destined to be read by a lady, a highly cultivated widow who now desired to form my acquaintance, and had commissioned him to present me to her.

In a house fitted up in the Pompeiian style, with the finest taste, though plainly, and with a certain colourless severity, I found a magnificently formed woman, with an intellectual face and great black eyes, clear, dark, fiery, and deep, that possessed rare powers of fascination. I envied my friend, and feared for him at the same time, for this was a woman who might bring the most exquisite joy or the most exquisite pain to the man who falls within her magic sphere.

She greeted me simply and cordially. We talked on a wide variety of topics, and I admired the profound knowledge and the conversational powers she displayed.

"I hate blue-stockings," she remarked, "who only study in order to boast of their knowledge. As for me, I want to be able to analyse the phenomena of life, and to this end I need science and art. My past life, which was a glittering desert, and my present status, confirmed me in this predilection—I might say they compel it. What else shall I do? How utilise my leisure? I have nothing to care for, and live isolated from all mankind mostly by my own choice. Were I a woman who was loved, and returned that love, then probably I should

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live only for my husband as wife and housekeeper, which I regard as the highest and noblest destiny of woman." And with these words she gave my friend a quick glance, full of fire.

My visit came to an end all too soon. I parted from this extraordinary woman with feelings of admiration, and the relations of my friend to her began to burden my heart. She loved him—but he? Silently he took his leave of her that evening, apparently lost in deep and heavy thought. We took the road leading to the city, and wandered along the gently murmuring ripples of the Bosphorus, which, languidly illumined by the glittering stars overhead, sought sportively to leap up on the quay.

After that evening he disappeared, as was occasionally his custom. The lady, it is true, answered my inquiries after our mutual friend with a calm voice and careless manner, but her face was more pale than usual; her eyes were surrounded by dark rings, and her features bore the expression of suffering. For over a month I could not get sight of my friend. He developed a really wonderful talent to avoid meeting me, for he still went his professional rounds with regularity; but, despite all my pains and artifices, I failed to meet him either in the street or in places he was wont to frequent.

Nevertheless, the air was full of rumours about him, one of which was to the effect that he was a frequent visitor at the house of a pasha's widow, and that he was infatuated with one of her slaves. Although the institution of slavery, and, above all, the slave trade, is officially abolished in Constantinople, in reality slavery exists to-day just as it did a hundred years since; but it must not show itself in public. For this there is good reason, since the Turkish household could not exist without female slaves.

No Turkish woman, no Turkish girl, who would pass for respectable, may appear unveiled before a man; even the lord of the household must, when he enters his house, give the warning cry "desdur!" (take care), that all women present, not his wives or daughters, may take refuge behind the veil and leave the house. Beings thus encumbered cannot, however, perform the household work; hence the slave is a necessity, for she is a non-Mohammedan—a mere thing—and may appear before any man without the veil. Should she rise to the dignity of a wife, she is at once invested with the veil, and she is thenceforward governed by the same moral and social code as the others.

The education of those slaves who are only luxuries constitutes a profession that is exercised chiefly by widows, but often also by the wives of high officials. The children are purchased from people of Caucassian blood; high prices are paid for a five-year-old handsome and intelligent girl.

She receives a careful education and instruction in the languages, music and dancing as well as in some of the arts, if she displays any talent in that direction.

Arrived at a proper age, the girl is sold into a rich and aristocratic family, in which the virtuous, highly educated, physically and intellectually-developed girl occupies a most anomalous position. She waits upon visitors, entertains them, and is an article of luxury—just as are in our elegant drawing-rooms the paintings of celebrated masters. Such a slave cannot be bought for less than £1,700. Not infrequently these young women marry men of high station, and some have even become the mothers of sultans.

Such a speculative educational institution was possessed by the widow of Essouf Pasha, and Dr. Franzeen had been selected by her as physician to the house. This was unusual, but of five of her pupils who had lain prostrate with typhus fever he had saved all. From that time the Turkish lady placed visits in a house which otherwise was open only to the richest Mohammedan buyers.

The rumours led me to think. Why did he hide himself from me? Why avoid the handsome widow, who, he must have known, loved him? There might be some truth in the rumour, although in one respect it must needs be false—one cannot court a slave.

It is an impossibility for such a girl to follow the bent of her inclinations, for she is the property of her educator, and should she attempt flight, the authorities would come to the aid of her owner, would find, and return her to slavery, and should her lover be a foreigner, whose legal punishment might cause diplomatic trouble, he would surely and silently disappear, never to be seen again.

Hence, there could be no thought of courtship in this case. But one way of getting possession of such a girl was open to a foreigner—to buy her, and as he is not permitted to keep a slave, to marry her.

I knew my friend to be without means, nor had he been able to accumulate much money during his one year's sojourn in Pera. How then could he indulge such idle fancies? It is true Dr. Franzeen was a peculiar man, that I knew right well; but foolish he was not. In all his undertakings he had a clear, attainable end in view; and yet I was much disturbed by his conduct for the past few weeks.

One day—I was reading my home-paper in the German club-room—a hand was laid upon my shoulder, and looking up I was surprised to see the lost one standing by my side. He looked thin and worn, and his attitude was less elastic than formerly.

"Shall we take a walk?" he asked, in a rather tremulous voice. I declared my willingness, and we took the road to the old bridge. For some time he walked silently by my side, and I followed his example, when presently he exclaimed excitedly:

"You are well-known in financial circles here, do you know anyone who would lend me fifteen thousand francs for a year? I would like to borrow that sum, and pay the usual interest."

"Then, after all, the rumour is correct?" I could not help saying.

"What rumour?" he asked excitedly.

"That you are in love with a slave-girl."

"And if it were so?"

"I thought you had other aims and ambitions."

"I had deceived myself," he replied, without looking up; "I was blinded by the soul, the originality, the depth, and the importance of the lady—I was fascinated by her individuality. But now a great passion has taken possession of the whole man in me—it is true love itself. I am infatuated with a charming being full of youth and fragrance; a being like a May flower; the personification of youth; spring with all its spiritual and material charms. She is a slave-girl, it is true, a pupil of the widow of Essouf Pasha, but I am determined to buy this girl, and make her my wife."

"Are you certain your love is returned?" I asked.

"I fancy I can read love in her eyes—to speak of love I have as yet been unable, under the peculiar conditions that obtain in Turkish households. She casts down her eyes when I accost her, while the others look at me calmly; she blushes when I approach, and her breathing is hurried; she trembles when I take her hand to feel her

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pulse, and she is always the first I see when I enter the house. If I discontinue my visits for a little while, she perceptibly revives on my return—that I have noticed."

"Have you, then, had an understanding with Mrs. Carlson?" I felt myself called upon to ask.

"That is impossible," he exclaimed excitedly. "What shall I tell her? What can I tell her? We are as good as betrothed. She is an extraordinary woman; remarkably handsome, rich, highly cultivated—but a certain something she lacked always. She never bewitched me; never drew me into such a delicious whirlpool of all my senses as does this quiet, youthful creature whom I have before my mind's eye wherever I am; who has taken possession of my entire being. With that lady I still possessed the power of thinking; here I am entirely without will."

"But, as a man of honour, you owe that lady an explanation," I ventured to remind him. "Go bravely to Mrs. Carlson and tell her all."

"I cannot do it," he groaned.

"Then write to her, at least."

"That would be cowardly; I could not bring myself to do it."

"Then you will come to grief, and you may besides bring ruin to two good, noble beings," said I, and parted in very bad humour from a man who could allow passion thus to unman him.

A few days after this meeting I received a letter from Mrs. Carlson which ran as follows:

"I am in need of a friendly service, and have no one to whom I can apply to help me. Your manner, your face, inspire me with the courage to address you. Will you have the goodness to call on me at an early date? I rely on your knightliness.—Flora Carlson."

I hesitated not a moment to place myself at the disposition of the lady, took a carriage, and drove to her villa.

I found the beautiful widow looking yet more pale, and her eyes had a fixed, far-off expression, as though she had no concern with her immediate surroundings, but with something far, far away.

"Do not be surprised," said the lady, after she had thanked me for my readiness to serve her, and my quick response to her call, "if I demand something unusual of you. Were it an ordinary matter I had not troubled you. You are the only friend of Doctor Franzeen, perhaps his confidant—then you know more than I can tell you. In that case you are also a dear confidant to me. I take that for granted, and in this capacity I invoke your good offices. Please"—and she made an heroic effort to maintain her composure, but her voice became almost inaudible—"go to the widow of Essouf Pasha, and tell her you come as the messenger of Affarid Pasha—here is his card—and you wish to see Tenzilé. You are a judge of men and women, I know. Observe the girl carefully, and report to me what you think of her appearance and how she impressed you. I need not tell you more," she concluded, giving utterance to the words with apparent effort. "I only wish to know how the girl looks, and have not the courage or the strength to confront her."

This commission took me aghast. It seemed that she knew all. What was her object in sending me on this mission? Did she wish to become acquainted with her rival? How would that serve her? Did she desire to institute comparisons between that person and herself, and did she wish to be convinced of the possession of such superior charms on the side of the slave-girl, that the hope of successful rivalry would be vain; or did she hope that if the opposite were the case, the man, charmed only by external appearances, would see his error, and return to her? But the lady's character forbade her entertaining such thoughts, or meditating such deeds. What, then, was her motive for this curious mission? Her feelings were too deeply involved for the gratification of ordinary curiosity—that was proved by the emotion and excitement she displayed when acquainting me with her wishes; still, she was a woman, and possibly these motives, connected, would guide her actions.

These thoughts ran through my brain while she was speaking to me.

"I shall endeavour to carry out your wishes," I replied, "though their fulfilment is not without difficulty, for one cannot well so describe a person that a third party shall see that person as she really is."

"You are a man and an artist," she replied, "and I shall hear the truth from you. With a woman, if she were the nicest judge of human nature in the world, and an artist besides, I should have my doubts. Beings of our sex judge only men rightly—at least as far as they affect—" She seemed to want to say something more, but broke off. "I can depend on you," she concluded abruptly.

Full of conflicting emotions, I returned to the city—to the Mohammedan quarters.

The house of the pasha's widow I found east of the Atmeidan, in one of the small side streets that branch out from that place; it differed in no respect from the rest of the Turkish houses—the same irregularly situated windows, with wooden bars, and the same red-painted oaken doors, studded with great nails, with a massive knocker. I set the latter in motion, and the portal opened after some delay. I stepped into a small vestibule, which was partitioned in the middle by a wooden grating extending from floor to ceiling. Behind this wooden grating stood a black female servant, who demanded my business.

I explained to her my mission, and the negress disappeared. Presently she returned with a second, then came a third, and finally an elderly French woman, evidently a governess. Then ensued a long parley. The four ambassadresses came and went. At last a lady in European costume, with yellow, Turkish face, and sharp black eyes, appeared behind the grating, subjected me to a searching scrutiny from between the bars, heard my mention of the pasha's name, which was on the card I carried, looked at the Turkish words written on the card, and retired, after saying a few (to me) unintelligible words to one of the black servants.

The wooden grating opened, and, beckoning me to follow, the old negress ascended a narrow, dark, stone stairway. I groped my way up the steps, and again found myself before a wooden grating. This was opened by the negress with a key that hung from a steel chain around her neck, and, crossing a grotesquely-decorated dark hall, following on the heels of my black guard, I reached a large room, also dark. The negress went to a window, lifted a heavy curtain to admit light, and invited me by a gesture to wait there.

I now had leisure to look round in the large space. It was impressive in its baldness. The walls were painted in a bluish oil-colour, upon which were sketched, at regular distances, gaudy birds of Paradise, rocking themselves on chains of roses. On the walls hung a few oil-paintings, portraits of the Sultan, and of the German and Austrian Emperors; three quite modern Parisian sofas, a grand piano, and an enormous, gaily-

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coloured paper lantern, suspended from the ceiling, completed the furniture of the room.

The Turkish lady presently returned, accompanied by the Frenchwoman, and introduced herself as the mistress of the house. She spoke very faulty French, and the governess was probably to act as interpreter. I signified to the widow that I could speak Turkish quite passably. She smiled pleasantly, scrutinised me still more critically out of her coal-black eyes, and pointed to a sofa opposite her.

"You wish to see Tenzilé?" began the widow, when we were seated.

"On commission," I hastened to say.

"Affarid Pasha wishes you to paint her portrait for a European lady, who is much interested in the excellent girl."

I was somewhat taken aback over my unexpected investment with the painter's skill—I am a sculptor—but quickly adapted myself to the situation, and said: "I believe such is the fact."

"Well," resumed the Turkish widow, "Affarid Pasha has opened negotiations with me for Tenzilé, whom he has known since her childhood. He is, as you are aware, thrifty; the sum for reimbursement of the outlays for her education seems to him too large, and he cannot make up his mind. It is quite contrary to our customs to paint the portrait of a young lady, unless it be destined for our most exalted lord, the sultan. However, I will make a special exception in favour of Affarid Pasha and his lady client. You shall be allowed to paint Tenzilé's portrait, but I cannot permit you to set foot in our house, be it for ever so brief a period, more than twice."

She made a sign to the French woman, who left the room and returned with a girl in Turkish dress.

"This is Tenzilé," said the widow.

The girl was loveliness itself—the incorporation of youth and beauty. There was in her personality something that moved the heart, yet ravished the senses; a slender, neat, yet full figure—such a figure as only an ancient Greek sculptor would succeed in copying and displaying as the apotheosis of the loveliest budding womanhood. The curly, undulating, golden-blonde hair; great, dreamy, black eyes; the finely-curved, gently-sloping nose; the oval face, with the faintest suspicion of yellow, with the full, sweet mouth, together completes the singular witchery of her appearance.

I now realised how my friend could have become intoxicated by the beauty of this child of a southern sun.

"The gentleman is to paint you, little daughter," explained the widow.

Tenzilé made a graceful courtesy, and a lovely blush spread over her cheek.

"I am not very pretty," she began in good French. "I have a yellow face; my friends, Serbe and Darie, are much prettier."

Her voice was wonderfully elastic and sweet.

"The gentleman has a commission to paint you for a Frankish lady, Tenzilé," the widow said; "he will only come twice, and you must, therefore, sit quite still," she added.

Tenzilé bent her head in assent.

"It will not trouble you long," I said, addressing myself to the beautiful slave; "I shall only make a flying sketch to-day, however," I continued, turning to the widow again, "it is necessary that I should converse with the young lady, for thus the soul, which must speak out of the face, reveals itself to us, and I beg your consent to that end."

The Pasha's widow consented.

Taking out my note-book, which for the nonce served as sketch-book, I sketched the outlines of the girl's face, meanwhile conversing with her on various topics. She showed a sharp intelligence and not uncommon knowledge, after the fashion of young, refined Frenchwomen, brought up in convents, and a childlike, affectionate heart. She observed me thoughtfully and with curiosity. Her puzzled, earnest, innocent expression filled me with sadness—almost with pain.

I could not bear to prolong the sitting. With deepest sympathy I took my leave of this girl, created to obey, unquestioning, the will of others.

I showed Mrs. Carlson—who, to judge from her expression, had waited for me impatiently—the sketch, and reported what I had seen, learned, felt, and thought, as calmly, dispassionately, and objectively as possible. She remained speechless while I spoke, then suddenly caught my hand, bent over it, and kissed it before I could draw it away—hot tears were on it when I did—then burying her face in her handkerchief she hurried from the room.

Sad at heart, I left the villa and walked home, wondering what was to come out of all this chaos.

I turned my steps towards the house of my friend. He was out; he had left his lodgings a few minutes before. But I found there a note addressed to me that was just to have been sent to me—its contents suited my plans and purposes.

"Dear friend," wrote Dr. Franzeen, "I feel very lonely. Will you come to-morrow? I hope you also have no engagement for the day. Shall we two forsaken ones spend the evening together in my quarters? I shall expect you if you do not at once decline the invitation."

The next day proved to be charming; it is true the heavens were overcast, but through the enveloping fog there shone a gentle sunlight that invested everything with a dreary aspect, the cupola-crowned houses of the great city, as well as the faded green hills and the gently murmuring waters.

I found my friend sitting at the piano, and was just in time to hear the last tones of a Beethoven sonata—he was a brilliant performer. Hearing me, he sprang up and greeted me, entirely unlike himself, with excitement and passionate warmth.

"If I had not that," and he pointed to his music, "I should have lost my reason ere this."

"Because you are parted from Flora?" I asked.

"Because I feel that I am acting irresponsibly towards that lady, and am facing an Oriental happiness—perhaps," he replied, half-musingly, half-inquiringly.

"It is not too late to call a halt and atone for your fault."

"I cannot tear myself away from the dream," he said, with a heavy breath; "it is only a dream that I realise, for I shall be unable to raise the sum demanded in the short time left me, and I have found out from the pasha's widow herself, that various grandees of the city, among them Affarid Pasha, are suitors for the girl. She will be taken from me, my hopes and wishes are as naught, and yet I cannot give her up. But do you imagine," he continued painfully, "that the lady would hail me as a prodigal son? Then you have but a poor insight into her character; it is pure, refined, and beaming like a diamond, but, in ethical matter, hard as that stone."

"The lady loves you," I asserted, "with the whole power of her noble, passionate soul."

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"The less likely that she will lower herself by descending to my level."

"Do you believe you will be happy with the slave?" I now asked involuntarily, in an earnest, weighty tone.

"If for ever—that I do not know. But it would be an almost crushing happiness for years, and such years count a hundredfold," he replied passionately. "And you cannot count the greatest happiness by years; they are really only moments—continuous happiness would kill. But I shall never be able to call this girl my own—and I have lost a noble heart."

It had become dark while we talked, though we had not noticed it. It had seemed to me that I heard wheels halt before the house, and steps in the ante-room. Then all was still again. My friend was just going to his writing-table to fetch a light, when the door flew open, and a flood of light streamed into the room. Was it a fairy scene that met my eyes? Did our excited phantasies deceive us? Or were we dreaming with eyes wide open? In the open doorway, carrying a letter in her hand, stood Tenzilé.

I sprang to my feet, and Doctor Franzeen stood as though transfixed, with staring eyes, pale and trembling, with his hands raised as though to ward off an apparition.

At this moment an elderly woman, whom I recognised as the housekeeper of Mrs. Carlson, stepped from behind the girl, took from her the letter, and with the words: "From my mistress, for the Herr doctor," laid it in Franzeen's hand.

He looked at the letter, and opened it as if in a dream. For a long time he read, nor seemed to know what he was reading. Again and again he read. His pale face took on some colour, the light returned to his eyes, and sinking into a chair, he wept aloud.

The beautiful girl looked with affright at this singular man, and trembled perceptibly.

I did not deem it an indiscretion to pick up and read the letter. It was from Mrs. Carlson.

"Dearly Beloved Friend" (it ran),—"I have learned that you turned for happiness elsewhere than to me.

"My life-aim is your happiness, hence I have bought the girl that is to bring you this message to day in order that you may be reminded that I have loved you truly, deeply, and sincerely, and that I have placed your happiness above my own. My only wish is that you may make the lovely being happy, and that you may be made happy in your choice. Tenzilé will return with my servant to her former mistress, and will remain with her as your betrothed until the necessary formalities for the wedding have been arranged.—FLORA CARLSON."

While I was reading the letter, Dr. Franzeen had risen, and now stood calmly before the beautiful slave.

"You know what is contained in this letter?" he quietly asked.

"Yes," answered the girl; but with blushes suffusing her cheeks.

"You are satisfied with the destination the European lady has in view for you?"

"My duty is to obey," Tenzilé answered tremblingly.

"Do you follow duty's call in this case with love—with your heart?" Dr. Franzeen questioned further.

Tenzilé raised her eyes to his for a moment, fully and calmly, and said:

"Why should I not? I shall be to you a faithful servant."

"Not servant—my wife you are to be. Know you that?"

"It has been told me," came from her full, fine lips.

"And does not your heart leap with joy at the thought?" questioned Dr. Franzeen; "do you not feel a nameless happiness because of this?"

"I am rejoiced," said the girl.

"And if you had to belong to another man, would that make you unhappy?" the young physician continued slowly.

"Then I would serve him, as it is my duty to do."

"Gladly?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you would not be unhappy if you could not belong to me?"

Tenzilé smiled. "I would gladly see in you my lord."

"You would not, however, feel unhappy, disconsolate, sad, if you could not belong to me?" persevered the young man.

"No," said Tenzilé, with the same smile.

The conversation had been carried on in the Turkish language. My friend now turned to me.

"The dream is over," he said. "I thought myself beloved. The girl belongs to another world than the one in which we live. She is a beautiful image, a beautiful plaything, but no wife for a Christian. Even if the letter and the mode of action of Mrs. Carlson had not already opened my eyes to a revelation, what nobility there may be in a woman, what she may be capable of, the purity of her love, the last few moments have torn from my eyes the veil that passion and intoxication of the senses wove over them. I go to throw myself at the feet of that woman, and to beg her forgiveness. This is the second time she has proved my saviour."

"Josepha," he continued, addressing the elderly companion of the girl, "do you go back to your mistress, conduct this pretty child to her, and tell her that I shall be with her in a few minutes to express my thanks."

Smiling sweetly, Tenzilé took her leave and disappeared with the housekeeper. Darkness again fell upon the room.

"You will excuse me?" asked Doctor Franzeen; "I shall attempt to obtain forgiveness," he added simply.

"I know that you will find it."

We parted with a long pressure of the hands, that said more than words could have expressed, and I returned to my lodgings.

I might have been at home an hour when I heard a carriage stop before the house, and in a few minutes Mrs. Carlson's little grey-headed English servant stood before me with an invitation to come to the villa as quickly as possible, and to make use of the carriage she had sent.

I ran down to the carriage in such haste that the old fellow could scarcely keep up with me.

Stepping into the drawing-room I found Mrs. Carlson and Dr. Franzeen standing, hand in hand, with that bliss shining from their eyes that only such moments can bring forth; bliss such as probably no human twain experience a second time in this life. On the table was the letter that Tenzilé had borne. The young girl had already returned to her former mistress.

How the reconciliation took place I never had a precise account. Dr. Franzeen merely hinted that he had said about the same thing to her that he had in the room to me—for that was all that at the moment he could think of. When he stepped into the lady's room and exclaimed: "Forgive me! forgive me! I have dreamed a hasheesh dream, but am now awake, and see but you alone in this world!" Mrs. Carlson fainted and lay senseless in his arms. At last she opened her eyes wide, looked deeply and gravely into his, lovingly put her arms about his neck and pressed her lips to his.

T. E.

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THIS is in the nature of a personal explanation. A long time ago I wrote a story which met with a certain degree of success; my friends and the reading public who greeted that so kindly have often asked why my pen has since been silent, and to them I make this confession—that the success of that story was equivocal. There was an under side to it, and an aftermath, and lines written between the lines, and parts of it were written with invisible, but indelible characters on the tablets of my heart.

Have you ever written a story? But of course you have—everyone has, nowadays; so you know, each of you, the swelling of the mind, gestant with great thoughts—how certain you were, when you began, that you had something to say, and how feeble our poor vehicle of expression seemed before the importance of it. Then, when finally written out in our common everyday phraseology, that glimmering of doubt: perhaps it was not the very first time that the same thing had been said: perhaps—but perish the thought!—it has been even better said before. Never mind. Though, poor thing, it is thine own now, and none else will ever know how you yearn over that bantling of your brain.

Thus with my story, as I thought it and planned it. Then, when circumstances compelled the changing of it all—but I anticipate.

My most intimate friend at that time was Fred Phillips, a young physician of much talent, but few patients. That is how my desk happened to be in his office, and how I chanced to allow him to work out some of the minor details of my story.

In the beginning, I had determined that my work should be of the realistic school. So, in order that all my portraiture should be true to life, after the heroine was fashioned "fair and so slenderly." Fred's professional knowledge was availed of to carry her through a long and interesting illness, and at the last to allow her to die in a rational and logical manner.

"I do not quite like the idea," he had said. "I see enough of that sort of thing"—the fact was, Fred's patients did die, mostly—"and I would much rather show how our art can be employed in assisting Nature at the last ditch."

"No, that won't do; this is to be a model of realism, and I don't want any fiction in it, except so much as is necessary to carry the idea," I replied.

"All right," replied Fred; "I will do the best I can for you. I won't draw a case from real life—from my own practice—for that would be unprofessional, but I will diagnose a case as it might be, and kill the patient off in a manner with which no one can find fault." I did not like his flippancy of tone very well, but I knew Fred could be of real use to me if he would, so I overlooked it.

My story was published in the *Family Omnibus*, as a serial. The publication had finally reached that point, where, after sundry convalescences and relapses, it could be clearly seen that the heroine was on the final down-grade.

On the evening of the day upon which the instalment appeared that settled this, Fred came into the office in a state of great excitement. Thinking it possible that he had been called to attend a patient, I congratulated him upon his change of luck, and quoted a certain proverb, to the effect that, "patient waiters, etc."

"Hang your proverbs!" he cried, rudely interrupting before I had finished. "This matter concerns yourself, as well as me. You must change that confounded story."

"Change our story?" I asked in astonishment.

"Our story?" he retorted. "I wash my hands of it. I shall be lucky if I can undo the harm that you have already done by it."

Harm! The story was as wholesome in tone as any combination of words that could possibly be formed. It could not harm even the most unsophisticated of novel-readers. I began to wonder if Fred's mind were not unsettled by his long waiting for the practice that never came. Yet I was too incensed to waste much sympathy on him.

"Will you be good enough to explain?" I asked icily. "That is, provided you are sane enough to know what you are talking about."

"Sane?" he answered. "I am sane enough now. I wish I had been as much so when you persuaded me to join in your confounded plot. But we must not quarrel, old fellow," he said, with some show of contrition. "I

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did not mean to use big words, but this matter is of the utmost importance; we must work together in it."

His matter impressed me with the genuineness of his own emotion, if not with the importance of his case, whatever that might prove to be; so I sat down again and made ready to listen to him.

He took a chair opposite, with his arms spread out on the table between us, as if mutely imploring my aid and forbearance. After a moment's silence, which he evidently thought to make impressive, he began:

"She is the most beautiful creature!"

"Who is the most beautiful creature?" I asked impatiently, as he came to a full stop.

"Ah! I forgot. You don't know her. Madge Wilmerdale."

Madge Wilmerdale! I fairly sprang from my chair in amazement. Clearly, the fellow was crazy. Madge Wilmerdale was the name of my heroine. It flashed upon me that the glorious creation of my imagination had in some curious manner become endowed to him with a corporeal being. How grand, yet how sad a testimony, to the skill with which I had wrought! I gazed upon my friend with eyes moist with sympathy for his misfortune, while yet my heart bounded with exaltation. Fred glanced up and divined the meaning of my look.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed pettishly. "Don't stare at me in that way. I don't mean your pen-and-ink Madge, but the real flesh-and-blood one."

Poor boy! he really believed in her. I would humour his hallucination, and thus gain time to determine what was best to do.

"Is there a flesh-and-blood one?" I asked, feigning amazement as best I could.

"Yes; but I can't say how long there will be if this goes on."

"Can't say how long there will be?" I echced.

"Man alive," he cried excitedly, "can't you do something besides repeat my words? Yes—I don't know how long there will be, if this goes on."

"If what goes on?" I asked, with a show of submission.

"That confounded story!"

"But what can I do about it?"

"Burn the thing."

"Why?"

"Because you are killing the real Madge with your outrageous details of the approaching death of the fictitious one."

Really, I thought, his hallucination is wonderfully complete; but I answered:

"Oh! you are giving me too much credit. I may say, with becoming modesty, that I know the story is a strong one; but that it can excite such emotions as will endanger life——"

"Emotions be hanged! Miss Wilmerdale is impressed with the belief that this story is drawn from life. The diagnosis that I was fool enough to invent for you happens to be exactly the same as that made in her own case. In watching the progress of the story, she fancies that she sees her own fate foreshadowed. It is a pathological curiosity—or would be, if it were not so wretchedly sad—that her condition grows better or worse in exact correspondence with that of the fictitious Madge."

Fred said all this with such quiet seriousness that I began to doubt the correctness of my first suspicions. Could it be that he had accidentally run across such a curious parallel?

"How did you happen to become cognisant of this precious analogy?" I asked.

"I was summoned by Mrs. Wilmerdale this morning, to consult regarding her daughter's condition. She had already been to the editor of the *Omnibus*, to discover the address of the author of the story. Denman refused to give that without your authority; but, knowing our relations, he advised her to consult me. I found that the daughter is firmly convinced that, whatever the fate of your Madge shall be, hers will be the same. I have pledged myself that the closing chapters find the heroine restored to health. You must help me make that pledge good."

After all, Fred was not crazy—only Quixotic. I was glad to know that, but of course my story could not be mutilated just for a girl's whim.

"It is all nonsense," I said, "to talk about changing the entire plot, just to humour a sick girl's fancy."

"It is not a mere fancy. I have long been satisfied that the mental condition often exerts a vast influence over the physical condition of a patient. Of course, I have not told Miss Wilmerdale that the death of this fictitious Madge is already arranged; but I have said to her mother that if I found it to be so it should be changed."

"It strikes me," I answered warmly, "that you have taken an unwarranted liberty in doing so. Even though the story is having this effect upon one susceptible reader, of which I am not wholly sure, I cannot see that I am responsible."

"Then you refuse to do anything? You will risk becoming a murderer for the sake of your own petty ambition?" Fred was losing his temper again.

"I have not said that; but I want time to investigate."

"There is no time to lose. The next number of the *Omnibus* will be issued the day after to-morrow. If you do not agree to change the story, I must take the other alternative and enjoin its further publication."

Now I knew that Fred was just foolish and hot-headed enough to take such a step as that, so I began to use diplomacy.

"Well, I will see Denman to-night and consult with him about the matter. I will make no promise yet; and it seems worth while——"

* * * * *

But the matter-of-fact editor put the affair in a new light.

"Says he will serve an injunction, does he? That would be the very best thing that could happen for us. Of course the injunction would not hold; it might cause a delay of a few weeks before we could resume publication of the story. If it did, I should report the matter fully in our columns and comment on it editorially. When we resumed the thing, it would sell like wild-fire."

After a moment, he continued: "I think, Mr. Morton, we had better get the M.S. all ready to issue in book form. Write a new preface, and we will put it on the market the day we print the last instalment. Such an opportunity must not be neglected. This affair is going to be a huge advertisement for you and for the *Omnibus*."

He rubbed his hands gleefully at the thought of the shekels that would soon be flowing through them.

I left the editorial room in a most uncertain frame of mind. I could not well afford to lose this chance of literary fame and fortune. I knew only too well how difficult it was to strike the tide at its flood, and had been working a long while to get my foot firmly on even the

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The matter-of-fact editor.

lowest round of the ladder. Now that I found myself ready to climb, must I kick the ladder from under me?

Just then a brilliant thought struck me. From Denman I had learned Mrs. Wilmerdale's address. I would call upon her.

I found her, with her daughter, occupying a handsome house in the western suburbs. My card requested that I might see Mrs. Wilmerdale alone. I did not care to reveal myself to the living Madge until I had resolved upon my line of action.

A graceful, pretty little old lady came forward to welcome me, asking, with an air that betrayed little interest, to what she was indebted for the honour of my visit. But the lack of interest in voice and manner vanished completely when I made myself known.

"Ah, sir, you are so good to come!" said she. "Dr. Phillips told us that he would use his influence. I know you have come to give us some hope."

I might have yielded at once, if it had not been for that unfortunate reference to Phillips. I had not yet forgiven him for his high-handed interferences, so, man-like, I retaliated upon this woman.

"I don't know, Mrs. Wilmerdale. You have asked something that is very difficult. If none of the story had been printed, it would be very different; and, you know, I have not any evidence that the matter is so important as you seem——"

"Ah," she interrupted, "you have not seen Madge. But you will see her? Then you will know." She clasped her hands appealingly before me, as if I held the balance of life and death.

And so I saw Madge Wilmerdale.

If ever, in all this world, a young girl—but what is the use of repeating? You remember the description of the other Madge as she was upon her eighteenth birthday?

Well, here was the creature of my fancy—the real rivalling the ideal.

At that moment I felt some genuine respect for the genius that had enabled me to limn so perfect a portrait from the mere filaments of my brain. But, on the instant, I was stricken to the heart that it should have been so true; for here was not only the perfect physical beauty that I had portrayed, and the beauty of soul as well, showing through those blue soul's windows, but here, too, were that hectic flush, and the sharp, quick cough that were the precursors of the inevitable end, when this beauty must perish, and be as dust.

When we were again alone I turned to Mrs. Wilmerdale.

"Is there no hope?" I asked.

"No one can help her but you, Mr. Morton. The physician can do nothing further."

The answer brought me back to myself.

"You fully believe, then, that she follows the course of the other—the fictitious Miss Wilmerdale?"

"As surely as night follows day."

"Then I can make but one answer. All that lies in my power shall be done. But—may I ask a favour, Mrs. Wilmerdale?"

"You cannot ask any that I shall not grant joyfully, if you do this thing."

"Then may I read the conclusion of my story to your daughter in advance of its publication?"

The lady gave me a quick glance—I fancied to see if she could discover my purpose, and if she might trust me—and nodded her assent.

That night I worked hard. I cut and hewed and hacked at that story. I ransacked Fred's library to make myself more familiar with the pathology of the dread disease. In an hour my heroine was convalescing—on paper. By daybreak she was well.

I was asleep on the office lounge when Fred came in and awakened me.

"So you have changed your mind," he said sneeringly. "I was up there last night after you left. You were easily converted."

"Who would not be, at the sight of that glorious creature?" I retorted.

"You have been at work already," he said, glancing about at my disordered papers.

"Yes; I am going up this afternoon to read the M.S. to them."

"Don't you think I had better go over it first, and see that you maintain some semblance of logic? You will have the critics down on you, if you are not careful."

"That for the critics now!" I cried, snapping my fingers.

"Well, as Miss Wilmerdale's physician, I warn you to be careful. Any undue excitement, sudden or false hopes held out, might prove very disastrous."

This was a change of tune, but I said nothing. It was part of my plain to be careful. I had as good an excuse now as had Fred for being admitted to the society of the Wilmerdales, and I did not propose to throw away my season-ticket for a single entertainment.

That afternoon I took with me a single chapter of the revised M.S.

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Madge was half reclining upon an easy lounge as I entered.

"Your mother tells me," I began, "that you are good enough to be interested in the story that I am publishing in the *Omnibus*, and I have thought it might amuse you to hear a portion of it in advance of publication; especially as my heroine has borrowed your name."

"You are the author, then, of the tale?" she asked sadly. "I would indeed be glad to hear the rest of the story, if I may. Because," she added, in a lower tone, that her mother might not hear, "because I doubt if I shall be able to read the finish when it is published."

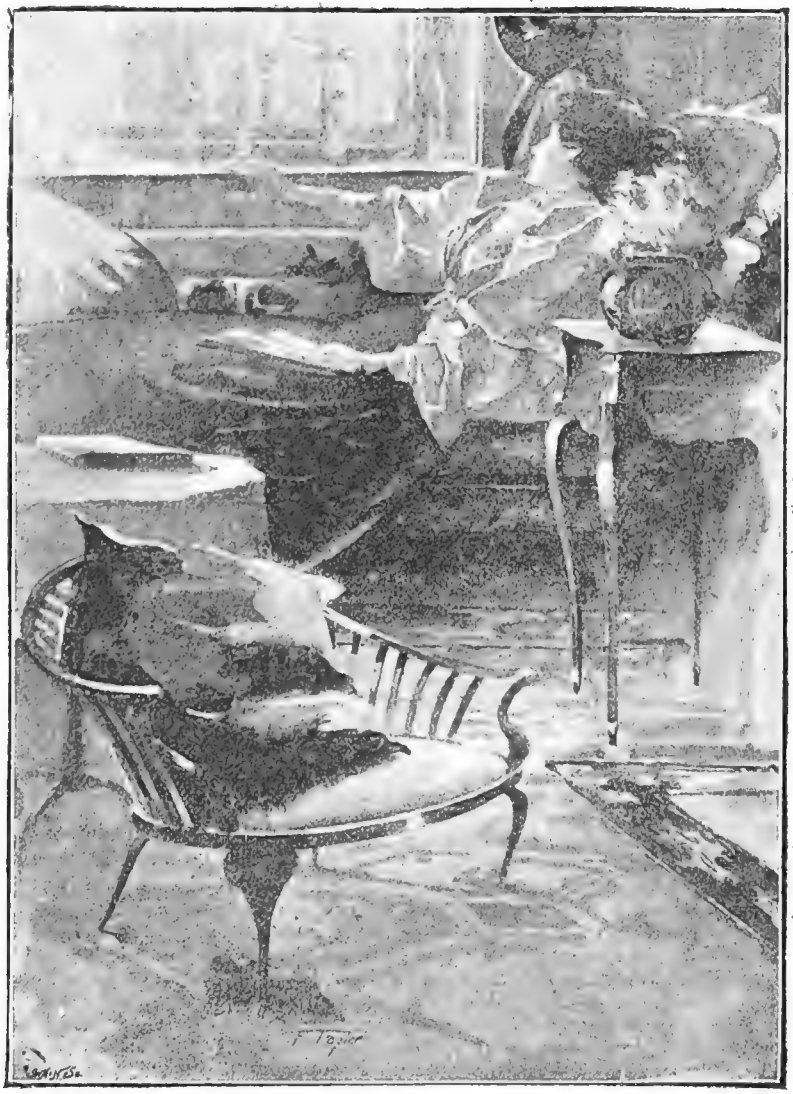
I sat beside her for half-an-hour and read, and when I had finished, there was a new light in her face. I fancied it was the light of renewed hope.

"Will the heroine live or die, Mr. Morton?" she asked.

"I wish I could tell you," I answered. "An author is sometimes as much in doubt as anyone regarding the future of his characters. But while there is life there is hope," I added lightly, "and because she is your namesake, Miss Wilmerdale, I hope her story may have a happy ending."

"I hope so, too," she said, with a most pathetic eagerness.

I controlled myself, and did not allow the story to progress too rapidly. At the end of a month, I went to her with the last chapters. Both the real and the fictitious Madge had improved wonderfully in that time, and the real one met me at the door, with a light step and merry laugh.



Madge was half reclining upon an easy lounge as I entered.

Fred Phillips was there, too, and he came forward and nodded to me more pleasantly than had lately been his habit. He was a frequent visitor at the house, keeping up the pretence of medical counsel; but it happened that we rarely met there.

He asked permission to remain and hear the final chapters read, and while I was not glad to have him, I could not well refuse.

With my audience of Madge, Fred, and Mrs. Wilmerdale, I read to the close. When I had finished, all joined in congratulating me; and Madge, with moist eyes, especially thanked me for what I had done for her. There was never any direct allusion between us as to just what that was, but of course it was perfectly understood.

I had meant to ask Madge a question at the close. That was, what reward should my heroine give to the man who had saved her life? I thought that I might, perhaps, make another chapter to the story if her answer suited me. But, with the others about, of course I did not ask it.

Mrs. Wilmerdale seemed to divine the situation, and put the question to me.

"Marry him," spoke up Fred, before anyone else could reply.

Surprised at finding an ally in such an unexpected quarter, I turned to thank him with a look, at the same time putting out a hand towards Madge to draw her to me, determined to tell her now how much I loved her.

Somehow, Fred seemed to guess my intention; he put himself between us and looked up at me laughingly.

"She has already consented," he said. "Congratulate us, Bob; we have been engaged for an hour." J. K. R.

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LABBY BOY'S WIN.

THE TRUE STORY OF A HORSERACE.

SURELY I had been dreaming! That prawn curry cooked *à la* Madrossi—"all same Madras boberchie cooking, sahib," as my Kitmutghar used to say—had made me drowsy. That's the way with these seductive curries; first one does not care for them overmuch, then one can eat curry three times a day and feel none the worse; next comes the time when they send one to sleep as though he had been poppy fed. This was the poppy time with me, and the whisky and soda at tiffin had not bettered it much.

Yes, just in the middle of my cheroot I had dropped off, sitting there in an easy-chair. The cheroot had cheerfully dived its red nose into my jarahm coat, and a hole like a bullet puncture bore testimony to the efficacy of the prawn curry and whisky-soda tiffin as a sedative.

Ye gods! how cool the verandah was to be sure; and how hot the bleaching sun over there against the white walls of the other hotel.

No man wakes under these circumstances without a cause; and so it must have been something unusual that did rouse me.

Ah! there it was again—there could be no doubt about that—my sporting ear had caught a low-toned conversation anent the pony races which were on.

I closed my eyes and went right on sleeping. I knew that I was asleep, for I heard one of the men say so presently.

"Don't talk so loud, Gomez," I heard an English voice say; "that fellow in the chair will hear you if you keep on talking like that."

"He is too far *that* side," replied Gomez in his best chee-chee baht (half-caste talk).

I was sleeping more soundly than ever now—I snored.

"Now don't you make any mistake about getting the money on," continued the English voice. "Labby Boy is fit to do the trick hands down, and, besides, *I ride him*, you see, and I'll take care that they never get near me. I've been put in to make the runnin', and I'll make it, and don't you forget it," and he chuckled like a cockatoo over thick cream.

The Lucknow Spring Races were on, albeit it was early for spring as understood of this country, being as yet February.

Labby Boy—and by the same token his name wasn't Labby Boy at all, though it began with an "L;" but even after nine years it is better that he read his history through another halter, and ditto the jockey, and ditto the owner, Lord George—was in the big handicap for Arabs, and had a rank outsider's chance.

I was a long way from being on velvet myself, in fact, I was on the commonest kind of cotton as far as having any of the bookies' money to go on with. They had cleared me out, and I was in no end of a hole. We had brought down a flyer from Migabad, and he had left us all stone broke. He was no good in the company he met at Lucknow.

Now I saw my way to getting some of it back, for I knew the speaker, "Tim" Doyle, was one of the best riders and judges in India.

So I slept hard and prayed that I might not sneeze or cough.

"Just keep your eye open and your mouth shut," he continued, "and when you see it say 20 to 1, you just nibble a little here and there, and don't give it away by being too anxious. Get the money all on and sit tight."

A *gharry* crawled up to the door, and the strong-voiced driver ceased to urge the ponies, which were not strong, and they stopped. "Tim," and his friend Gomez, the half-caste, got in; the variously dished wheels meandering in and out; the *gharry wallah* poured a volley of chronological abuse into the flapping ears of the hide-bound rats harnessed to the old trap upon which he sat; there was the flack, flack, of the whip, and they disappeared in the white heat out on the roadway.

Then I woke up.

I, too, took a *gharry* to the racecourse. I was in no hurry, so it did not matter; besides it was too hot to walk.

Ordinarily I should have been able to describe the races—how the game little Arab ponies, silver, golden, chesnut and blood bays fought it out on that beautiful green sward track, with its three-quarter mile straight run in; but that day my business was with the bookies.

I had received a providential tip, and if I played it well—as well as I had often played a horse I knew nothing about—I should not have to hand in my papers. I watched three races in the paddock and the stand inclosure. The bookies had won about a flour bag full of money each, which was about their usual form on an Indian course, where everybody plays his money on the horse and the bookmakers play theirs on the owner.

I made no move about Labby Boy. I knew better than to try and forestall Tim and his friend. When I saw the money going on from the right quarter, it would be quite time enough for mine, I knew.

The next race was the Bagdad Plate. That was Labby Boy's race. There were a half-dozen other Arabs in it. Problem and Young Jawan were about equal favourites, and the race was thought to be between them. They had met before down at the Calcutta meet, and Young Jawan had beaten Problem.

Problem was Labby Boy's stable companion, both being in Lord George's stable. So I knew that Tim was speaking from the book when he said that Labby Boy could do the trick.

"Six to four the field!" yelled "Parson" Britton, the tall, sanctimonious-faced bookmaker.

There was a rush among the betters to "get on." In a minute the cry all down the line of bookmakers was: "Five to four Problem, two to one Young Jawan!" They were backing Problem.

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Then I saw Lord George go down the line, notebook in hand. Then Problem was cut again; six to four *on* now, and I knew that Lord George was having a plunge.

There was a small army of small betters following Lord George up, and soon Problem was backed off the boards. All the money was for these two, Problem and Young Jawan, so the others travelled out in the betting; it was 20 to 1 the others and take your pick, Labby Boy, Silver Tail, Shahbaz, and the lot.

I was standing close to Millar and Britton's stand, for I knew that Gomez would make his first play to get the money on there, as they were the big bookmakers.

But I could not understand it at all. If Labby Boy was fit to do the trick, why did not Lord George know it? He and his friends were simply piling their money on Problem. Problem was always supposed to be a better horse than Labby Boy, too. But it was just this sort of reasoning that had nearly broken me already at the meeting. So I determined to follow this strong lead if I caught it in time, and let reason go to the dogs. I meant taking a regular flyer; if it came off, I should be able to pay up all round; if not—well, other men have had to send in their papers before.

Presently I saw Gomez edge up to where Britton was laying the odds.

I did not catch what Gomez said, but I heard Britton say: "Yes, 20 to 1, and he's a dead sure winner; 2,000 to 100; I'll lay you twice," and he looked as solemn as a judge, thinking how he would like to scoop in a couple of hundred from this innocent looking half-caste.

I saw Gomez shove up a couple of crisp bank-notes, and I didn't wait for anything further.

I went over to my friend Little Archer, who had bested me all through the meeting, and I made glad his heart with the money I piled on this "dead-un," as he called it. He laid me the odds freely, and chaffed me more freely still. "Did Lord George tell you," he said, "or did your dhoby (washerwoman)?"

He was happy, for Lord George had backed the other with him, and he looked on my investment as just so much money found.

"Don't put your friends on to it, or they'll break me," he laughed, as I started off, and then I went back and booked him another 1,000 to 50, just to teach him manners.

The betting was pretty well over by this time, for the horses were down at the post. I could see that Gomez had been down along the line of bookies, for Labby Boy had been cut a few points with some of them.

I went up in the grand stand, for I thought I should like to see this sort of thing of which I had no understanding.

"They're off!" cried someone, and a dozen voices repeated it.

It was two miles, so there would be plenty of time for observation.

At the start Silver Tail cut out the space at a clinking gait. He opened up a gap between himself and the others, and Lord George smiled.

This was as he had ordered it. Silver Tail was also in the same interest, a subsidised interest, being owned by a brother officer in the 101st Lancers, Lord Clapperton.

I could see Labby Boy lying next, and then came Problem and Young Jawan together.

Silver Tail had cut it out so lively that at the three-quarters he was done. Then Labby Boy went on, and took up the running. This also was as Lord George had ordered it, and Problem was keeping his place back with Young Jawan.

That was the programme just as it was being carried out, and Problem was to come away at the finish and win.

Lord George looked round and saw me standing just behind him.

"Have you got anything on him?" he asked.

"Yes, quite a lot," I replied discreetly.

He smiled approvingly. "You're all right," he said, "he'll win it hands down," thinking of Problem.

"I hope so," I added, thinking of Labby Boy.

At the mile Labby Boy had a long lead; at the mile and a half it was longer.

People began to look grave.

Why didn't Bung shake Problem up? Why didn't he come away? But those were his orders—to stay behind with Young Jawan.

When they turned into the straight, Labby Boy still had a tremendous lead. The others were coming now, fast, fast, and faster. Problem and Young Jawan were racing neck and neck. The jockeys were straining every nerve. The beautiful Arabs, dark bays both of them, were galloping side by side like two brothers—like the two horses of a matched pair; a blanket would have covered them both.

It was the race of a lifetime. Nose and nose they raced; low to the ground they thundered along. But the other, Labby Boy—would they catch him?

Lord George's face was serious enough now. I heard him say softly behind his blonde moustache: "Good heavens; look at Labby Boy. The very devil's in the horse. He's running away with Tim."

And so it seemed. It looked as though Tim were trying to come back to his horses now. Of course he could not take a direct pull at him, for Labby Boy and Problem were running under different owners' names, though they were really in the same interest—Lord George's.

Nine out of every ten of the men in that stand had their money either on Problem or Young Jawan. They were running neck and neck still, but here was this outsider, Labby Boy, who had made all the running and should have been beaten off by this time, according to all the ethics of racing, still in the lead—many lengths in the lead.

And so they flashed by the stand, Labby Boy lasting out to get home in front, with Problem drawing into second place, a length ahead of Young Jawan.

Then a great silence fell on the stand. Only the bookies had won and two others. But that was Gomez's secret and mine.

Anger and consternation made a racecourse of Lord George's face. He stood on the steps of the stand, just by the weighing scales, and said in a loud voice, with plenty of passion in it; "No more Tim Doyle for me!" But that was his way.

When Tim came in to weigh, there was a scene, for Lord George was the last man in the world to pocket anything like that quietly.

"I only obeyed orders, my lord," said Tim. "My orders were to take up the running from Silver Tail, and make it as far and as strong as I could, and I did so, and Labby Boy got home first; and that's all I know about it."

And I'm wondering if it was. Perhaps Gomez could say.

H. Sadler.

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The Traitor.

IN the little village of Padron, in Galicia, during the French invasion, lived Garcia de Paredes, a crabbed old bachelor and licensed apothecary. It was on a cold and unpleasant night in autumn, about ten o'clock, that a silent group of shadows came into the square known to-day as the Plaza de la Constitution. They were going towards Garcia de Paredes' apothecary shop, which had been securely closed since nine.

"What are we going to do?" asked one of the shadows.

"Break in the door," suggested a woman.

"And kill them," growled many voices.

"I will take care of the apothecary," said a little fellow.

"They say that more than twenty Frenchmen are taking supper with him to-night."

"Ah, if it were in my house! Three, billeted upon me, I have thrown into the well."

"And I," said a monk, in a flute-like voice, "have smothered two captains by leaving burning charcoal in their cell, which was mine before."

"And that wretch of an apothecary protects them!"

"Who would have thought it of Garcia de Paredes? It is not a month since he was the most valiant, the most patriotic, the most loyal man in the town."

"And to-night he is going to the French officers."

"Let us wait awhile," suggested an old man; "then we will enter, and not one of them shall be left alive."

While these manifestations were occurring at the door of the pharmacy, Garcia de Paredes and his guests pursued the god of pleasure with ardour.

Garcia de Paredes was about forty-five years of age. He was tall and as yellow as a mummy. His bald head shone with a phosphorescent lustre, and his black eyes, deep sunken under shaggy brows, were like mountain-imprisoned lakes that threaten sullenly.

The food was abundant, the wine good, the conversation animated. The Frenchmen laughed, sang, smoked, ate and drank at the same time. Garcia de Paredes joked, perhaps, even more than anyone else, and so eloquent had he been in favour of the imperial cause, that the soldiers of Napoleon had embraced him, praised him, and improvised songs in his honour.

"Señors," the apothecary had said, "the war that we Spaniards are waging is as stupid as needless. You sons of the Revolution came to rescue Spain from her traditional lethargy; to dissipate her religious shadows; to reconcile her ancient customs; and to teach her those useful truths that there is no God and no other life, and that penitence, abstinence, chastity, and other Catholic virtues are but Quixotic absurdities, improper and unnecessary for a civilised people; that Napoleon is the true Messiah, the redeemer of the people, the friend of humanity. Señors, may the Emperor live as long as I have to live!"

"Hurrah! Bravo!" cried the Frenchmen.

The apothecary bowed his head with an expression of unspeakable pain. Quickly he raised it as firm as before. He drank a glass of wine, and went on:

"An ancestor of mine, Garcia de Paredes, a barbarous fellow, a Samson, a Hercules, killed two hundred Frenchmen in one day. I think it was in Italy. You see he was not so fond of the French as I am. The King himself made him a knight, and he was more than once on guard at the Quirinal, when Alexander Borgia was Pope. Ha! ha! You didn't think I came of such distinguished ancestors. Well, this Diego Garcia de Paredes, this ancestor of mine, who has an apothecary for a descendant, captured Coszenza and Manfredonia, took Cerinolia by assault, and fought honourably at the battle of Pavia. There we made a King of France prisoner, and his sword has been in Madrid nearly three centuries, until we were robbed of it nearly three months ago by that son of an innkeeper, Murat, who is in command of your army."

Here the apothecary made another pause. Some of the Frenchmen were going to reply to him; but he, rising, and enforcing silence by his gesture, seized a glass convulsively and exclaimed, in a voice of thunder:

"I give you a toast, gentlemen: Hurrah for the Frenchmen of Francis the First and of Napoleon Bonaparte!"

"Hurrah!" cried the invaders, acknowledging their satisfaction. All drained their glasses.

About that time a noise was heard in the street, or, rather, at the shop door.

"Did you hear that?" asked the Frenchmen.

Garcia de Paredes smiled.

"They are coming to kill me," he said.

"Who?"

"My neighbours."

"What for?"

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"Because I am a French sympathiser. Several nights ago they surrounded my house. But what difference does that make to us? On with the feast!"

"Yes, on with it!" exclaimed the guests. "We are here to defend you." And, clinking the bottles and glasses, they shouted together: "Hurrah for Napoleon! Death to Ferdinand! Death to Castile!"

Garcia de Paredes waited till the toast was drunk, and then said in a mournful tone:

"Celedonio!"

The shop boy thrust his head through a small door. He dared not enter that inner room.

"Celedonio, bring some ink and paper," said the apothecary calmly.

The boy soon returned with the writing materials.

"Sit down," said the master, "and write the figures I will give you. Make two columns. At the head of the column at the right place, Debit, and at the head of the other, Credit."

"Señor," stammered the boy, "there is a mob at the door, crying 'Kill the apothecary!'"

"Be quiet. Leave them alone, and write what I tell you."

The Frenchmen laughed with admiration to see the pharmacist occupied in adjusting his accounts even while surrounded by death and ruin.

"Let us see, señors," said Garcia de Paredes. "We will finish our feast with a single toast. You—Captain—tell me—how many Spaniards have you killed since crossing the Pyrenees?"

"I," replied the Captain, arrogantly, twirling his moustache—— "I have killed—personally—with my sword—ten or perhaps twelve."

"Eleven, at the right," cried the apothecary, speaking to the boy.

The boy repeated, after writing:

"Debit, eleven."

"And you?" continued Garcia de Paredes, "I speak to you, Señor Julio."

"I—six."

"And you, Commandant?"

"I—twenty." "I—eight." "I—fourteen." "I—none." "I—don't know. I fired with my eyes shut." And so on, each one in his turn.

"Let me see, now, Captain," continued Garcia de Paredes. "We will begin again with you. How many Spaniards do you expect to kill during the remainder of the war, supposing it to last—say three years?"

"Oh—well, call it eleven."

"Eleven to the left!" dictated Garcia de Paredes, and Celedonio repeated:

"Credit, eleven!"

"And you?" inquired the apothecary, in the same order as before.

"I—fifteen." "I—twenty." "I—one hundred." "I—one thousand." And so on replied the Frenchmen.

"Divide them by ten, Celedonio," murmured the apothecary ironically, "and add each column separately."

At the end of a breathless silence, Celedonio, turning towards his master, read as follows:

"Debit, two hundred and eighty-five; credit, two hundred."

"That is to say," said Garcia de Paredes, "two hundred and eighty-five killed and two hundred sentenced to death. Total, four hundred and eighty-five victims."

At this moment the outer door of the shop was broken in.

"What time is it?" asked the apothecary, with the greatest composure.

"Eleven o'clock. But don't you hear them coming?"

"Let them come; it is time."

"Time!—for what?" murmured the Frenchmen, trying to rise. But they were so intoxicated they were unable to leave their chairs. "Let them come!" they cried, however, grasping their sabres with great difficulty and vainly endeavouring to get upon their feet.

Below in the shop was heard the noise of the crowd, and above the clamour rang out the unanimous and terrible cry:

"Death to the traitor!"

Garcia de Paredes, hearing that cry, sprang up as though electrified.

"Let them enter!" he shouted. "Open the door! Let them all come and see how a descendant of a soldier of Pavia can die."

The Frenchmen, terrified, stupefied, riveted to their chairs by an unconquerable lethargy, believing that the death of which the Spaniards spoke was about to enter the room, made desperate efforts to lift their sabres, which were lying on the table; but their fingers were unable to grasp the hilts.

At this moment the crowd poured into the room. There were more than fifty men and women armed with cudgels, daggers, and pistols, and all uttering wild cries.

"Kill them all!" shouted some of the women.

"Hold!" thundered Garcia de Paredes, with such a tone, such an attitude, such a look, that his cry, combined with the immovability and silence of the Frenchmen, infused a cold terror in the crowd.

"Put up your daggers," continued the apothecary, with a failing voice. "I have done more than you for my country. I have played the traitor—and—now you see the twenty officers of the invaders. Don't touch them; they are poisoned."

A cry of terror and admiration issued from the breasts of the Spaniards. They moved a step nearer to the guests, the greater part of whom were already dead, with their heads fallen forward, their arms outstretched upon the table, and their hands yet on the hilts of their swords.

"Hurrah for Garcia de Paredes!" then shouted the Spaniards, surrounding the dying hero.

"Celedonio," murmured the pharmacist, "the opium is all gone. Send to Corunna for opium."

Then he fell upon his knees.

Only at that did the neighbours perceive that the apothecary was also poisoned.

Then you might have seen a picture as impressive as it was dreadful. Women, sitting on the floor, were supporting in their arms the expiring patriot. The men had caught up the candles from the tables, and, on their knees, were lighting up that group of patriotism and affection. Twenty dead or dying were in the shadow, some of whom were falling to the floor, with horrifying thuds.

And at each dying gasp that he heard, at the fall of each Frenchman to the floor, a smile of glory illumined the face of Garcia de Paredes. A little later his spirit took flight.

PEDRO DE ALARCON.

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The Cardinal's Watch.

In Rome, my performances created a great sensation. His Holiness himself, on hearing of me, did me the signal honour of requesting a performance, at which I was advised all the dignitaries of the church would form my audience.

You can fancy with what eagerness I acquiesced in his wish, and what care I devoted to my preparations. After selecting all my best tricks, I ransacked my brains to invent one worthy of my illustrious spectators. But I had no need to search long, for chance, that most ingenious of inventors, came to my aid.

On the day prior to the performance, I was in the shop of one of the finest watchmakers of Rome, when a servant came in to ask if His Eminence the Cardinal de ———'s watch was repaired.

"It will not be ready till this evening," the watchmaker replied, "and I will do myself the honour of carrying it to your master myself." When the servant had retired, the tradesman said to me:

"This is a handsome and costly watch. The Cardinal to whom it belongs values it at more than ten thousand francs, for, as he ordered it himself of the celebrated Breguet, he fancies it must be unique of its kind. Strangely enough, though, only two days ago, a young scamp belonging to the city offered me a precisely similar watch, made by the same artist, for one thousand francs."

"Do you think," I said to him, "that this person is still inclined to dispose of his watch?"

"Certainly," the watchmaker replied. "This young prodigal, who has spent all his fortune, is now reduced to sell his family jewels."

"Well, I am anxious to purchase the watch, but it must be to-day. Have the kindness, then, to buy it for me. After that, you will engrave on it His Eminence's arms, so that the two watches may be perfectly similar, and on your discretion the profit you make by the transaction will depend."

The watchmaker knew me. He said:

"I only require a quarter of an hour to find him, and I am confident your offer will be accepted."

That same evening the watchmaker brought me two chronometers and handed me one. On comparing them it was impossible to detect the slightest difference. It cost me dear, but I was now certain of performing a trick which must produce a decided effect.

The next day I proceeded to the Pontiff's palace, and, at six o'clock, upon a signal given by the Holy Father, I stepped on the stage. I never had appeared before such an imposing assembly. Pius the Seventh, seated in a large arm-chair on a daïs, occupied the foreground; near him were seated the cardinals, and behind them were the different prelates and dignitaries of the church.

I could not describe to you all the pleasure I felt on this evening; and the spectators seemed to take such lively interest in all they saw, that I felt myself in unusual spirits. The Pope himself was delighted.

"But, M. Torrini," he continually said, with charming simplicity, "how can you do that? I shall be quite ill with merely trying to guess your secrets."

After the "blind man's game of piquet," which literally astounded the audience, I performed the trick of the "burnt writing," in which I received an autograph I set great store by. This is how the trick is done:

A person writes a sentence or two; he is then requested to burn the paper, which must be found afterwards intact in a sealed envelope. I begged His Holiness to write a sentence; he consented, and wrote as follows:

"I have much pleasure in stating that M. Torrini is an amiable sorcerer."

The paper was burned, and nothing could depict the Pope's astonishment on finding it in the centre of a large number of sealed envelopes. I received his permission to keep this autograph.

To end my performance and set the crown on my exploits, I now proceeded to the trick I had invented for the occasion.

Here I had several difficulties to contend with; the greatest was certainly to induce Cardinal de—— to lend me his watch, and that without asking him directly for it, and to succeed I must have recourse to a ruse. At my request several watches were offered me, but I returned them with the excuse, more or less true, that as they had no peculiarity of shape, it would be difficult to prove the identity of the one I chose.

"If any gentleman among you," I added, "has a watch of rather large size—this was a peculiarity of the Cardinal's—and would kindly lend it to me, I should prefer it as better suited for the experiment. I need not say I will take the greatest care of it. I only wish to prove its superiority, if it really possess it, or, on the other hand, to marvellously improve it."

All eyes were naturally turned on the Cardinal, who, it was known, set great value on the exaggerated size of his chronometer. He asserted, with some show of reason, perhaps, that the works acted more freely in a large case. However, he hesitated to lend me his beloved watch till Pius the Seventh said to him:

"Cardinal, I fancy your watch will suit exactly; oblige me by handing it to M. Torrini."

His Eminence assented, though not without numberless precautions, and when I had the chronometer in my hands, I drew the attention of the Pope and the cardinals to it, while pretending to admire the works and handsome chasing.

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"Is your watch a repeater?" I then said to the Cardinal.

"No, sir, it is a chronometer, and watches of that degree of accuracy are not usually incumbered with unnecessary machinery."

"Indeed! a chronometer; then it must be English," I said, with apparent simplicity.

"What, sir," the Cardinal replied, as if stung by my remark, "do you think chronometers are made only in England? On the contrary, the best specimens have always been made in France. What English maker can be compared with Pierre Leroy, Ferdinand Berthoud, or Breguet, above all, who made that chronometer for me?"

The Pope began to smile at the Cardinal's energy.

"Well, then, we will select this chronometer," I said, putting a stop to the conversation I had purposely started. "I have then, gentlemen, to prove to you its solidity and excellent qualities. Now for the first trial."

And I let the watch fall to the floor. A cry of terror rose on all sides, while the Cardinal, pale and trembling, bounded from his seat, saying, with ill-suppressed wrath:

"You are playing a very sorry jest, sir."

"But, monseigneur," I said, with the greatest calmness, "you have no occasion to be frightened, I merely wish to prove to the gentlemen the perfection of your watch. I beg you not to be alarmed; it will escape scathless from all the trials I subject it to."

With these words, I stamped on the case, which broke, flattened, and soon presented but a shapeless mass. At first I really fancied the Cardinal was going into a fit; he could scarcely restrain his passion; but the Pope then turned to him:

"Come, Cardinal, have you no confidence in our sorcerer? For my part, I laugh like a child at it, being convinced there has been some clever substitution."

"Will your Holiness permit me to remark," I said, respectfully, "that there has been no substitution? I appeal to His Eminence, who will recognise his own watch."

And I offered the Cardinal the shapeless relics of his watch. He examined them anxiously, and finding his arms engraved inside the case, said, with a deep sigh:

"Yes, that is certainly my watch. But," he added drily, "I know not how you will escape, sir; at any rate, you should have played this unjustifiable trick on some other object that might be replaced, for my chronometer is unique."

"Well, your excellency, I am enchanted at that circumstance, for it must enhance the credit of my experiment."

The identity of the Cardinal's watch thus proved, I wished to pass into the Pope's pocket the remaining one of the pair. But I could not dream of this so long as His Holiness remained seated. Hence I sought some pretext to make him rise, and soon found one.

A brass mortar with an enormous pestle was now brought in. I placed it on the table, threw in the fragments of the chronometer, and began pounding furiously. Suddenly a slight detonation was heard, and a vivid light came from the vessel, which cast a ruddy hue over the spectators, and produced a magical appearance. All this while, bending over the mortar, I pretended to see something that filled me with the liveliest astonishment.

Through respect for the Pope, no one ventured to rise, but the Pontiff, yielding to his curiosity, approached the table, followed by a portion of the audience. They might look and look; nothing was to be seen but flame.

"I know not whether I must attribute it to the dazed state of my brain," said His Holiness, passing his hand over his eyes, "but I can distinguish nothing."

"I only require a quarter of an hour to find him."

I, too, had much the same idea; but far from confessing it, I begged the Pope to come round the table and choose a more favourable spot. During this time I had slipped my reserve watch into the Pope's pocket. The experiment was certain, and the "Cardinal's watch" was by this time reduced to a small ingot which I held up to the spectators.

"Now," I said, "I will restore this ingot to its original shape, and the transformation shall be performed during its passage to the pocket of a person who cannot be suspected of complicity."

"Aha!" the Pope said in a jocular tone, "that is becoming a little too strong. But what would you do, my good sorcerer, if I asked you to chose my pocket?"

"Your Holiness need only order for me to obey."

"Well, M. Torrini, let it be so," was the Pope's ready reply.

I took the ingot in my hands, showed it to the company, and it disappeared on my uttering the word "Pass!"

The Pope, with manifestations of utter incredulity, thrust his hand in his pocket. I soon saw him blush with confusion and draw out the watch, which he handed to the Cardinal as if afraid of burning his fingers.

When my audience were assured that I had fulfilled my promise, I received the applause so successful a trick deserved.

The next day the Pope sent me a rich diamond snuff-box, while thanking me for all the pleasure I had occasioned him.

This performance created a great sensation in Rome, and everyone flocked to see my marvels. Perhaps they hoped to witness the famous trick of the "broken watch," which I had performed at the Vatican. But, though I was then very extravagant, I was not so mad as to spend ten hundred francs a night in a trick.

Percy Windred.

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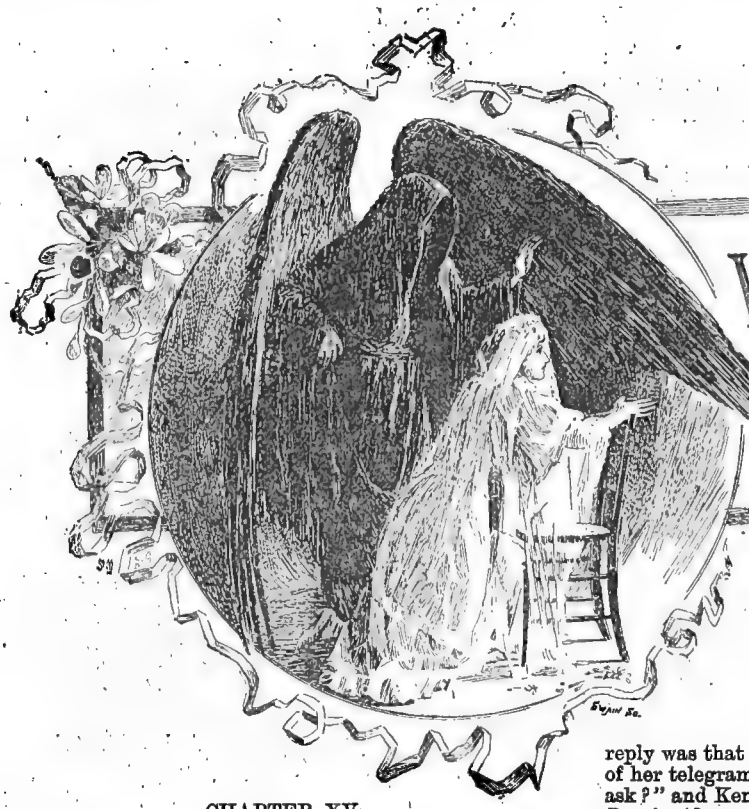

THE WYTHECOMBE MYSTERY: A ROMANCE.

By J. K. Leys.
Illustrated by S. Mar. Fitz-Gerald.

CHAPTER XV.

A ray of light, sudden and keen as a lightning-flash, darted into Kenyon's mind from the last word of that message.

Some one, poor Jane Unwin most likely, had used Miss Denver's name to bring Vere to Paddington terminus that Tuesday afternoon. It was Winnie, his affianced bride, he went to meet. Nay more, if it was Jane Unwin who sent the telegram, she must have known that if she had telegraphed in her own name Vere would not have come to the railway-station to meet her. Therefore it was impossible that the relations between them could then have been of a very intimate character, whatever they might have been in the past.

For a long time Kenyon stood with the bit of paper in his hand, trying to realise what were the features of the landscape which this new light revealed to him.

First of all, it was clear that Vere must be acquitted of anything like double dealing. He might be ill, or wounded, or dead, or he might be in danger from the law. Any one of these causes might account for his strange silence. But the odious suspicion that he had kept up an intrigue with Jane Unwin during his courtship, and had at the last moment preferred to wound and insult his bride, and efface himself from the world, rather than give up the dishonourable connection, must be abandoned. So far, at least, Vere's character was cleared.

But what use could be made of this discovery?

That was a question Kenyon could not answer; and though he pondered over it for the greater part of the night he could find no way of turning the telegram to any good account.

Next morning he dispatched a message by wire, not to the Rector as he had at first intended, but to Katherine Dale, asking her to inquire of Winifred Denvers whether she or anyone acting for her had sent a telegram to Vere on the Tuesday on which he disappeared. As he expected, the reply was that no such message had been sent. At the end of her telegram Kate had added the words: "Why do you ask?" and Kenyon answered them by letter, pointing out the significance of what he had found.

That day Kenyon spent in the City, where business connected with the bank detained him till a late hour in the evening.

Next morning before he left his hotel a card was brought to him. He started and frowned as he read the name inscribed on it—Paul Shenstone.

Harold had hoped that Shenstone and he would never meet again; and here, already, the man was dogging his footsteps! But Kenyon felt that he had no sufficient excuse for refusing to see him.

"Show the gentleman in," he said to the waiter.

"You are surprised to see me, I dare say," said Paul, coming forward with outstretched hand; "but I had to come up to town last night on some rather important business; and I thought I would look in upon you to ask about that telegram you sent to Miss Dale yesterday. I happened to be with her when she received it, and we speculated a good deal as to what you could mean by it. I fancy you must have discovered something new."

"It is very good of you to take so much interest in the matter," said Harold drily, but politely. And indeed Shenstone's tone was that of serious concern.

"Personally, I have nothing to do with Vere's fate," returned Shenstone; "but, of course, I am naturally curious about the poor fellow; and I would be very glad if I could be of any use to you. Miss Dale seemed to think that I might be of some service."

Kenyon muttered a few civil words, and briefly told how and where he had found the telegram which was virtually a forgery.

Shenstone kept his eyes fixed on Harold's face while he was speaking, and when he had ended, dropped them towards the floor.

"Don't you think this changes the situation very much?" asked Kenyon.

Shenstone shook his head.

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"If you ask me," said he, "I confess that I don't think it does. You see, we have the fact of the poor girl's death to account for. What I am afraid of is, that if we stir in the matter we shall do your friend great and irreparable injury."

"You mean by discovering his retreat?"

Shenstone nodded.

"Then you think still that he—that Launcelot Vere, who never to my knowledge injured a living creature—shot, deliberately murdered, that poor girl?"

Shenstone opened his eyes in surprise.

"I thought no one doubted that," he said.

"You did not know him as I did," said Harold. Shenstone's cool manner, his quiet assumption of the guilt of the missing man, irritated him.

"True," said Paul. "I look at the case simply as an outsider."

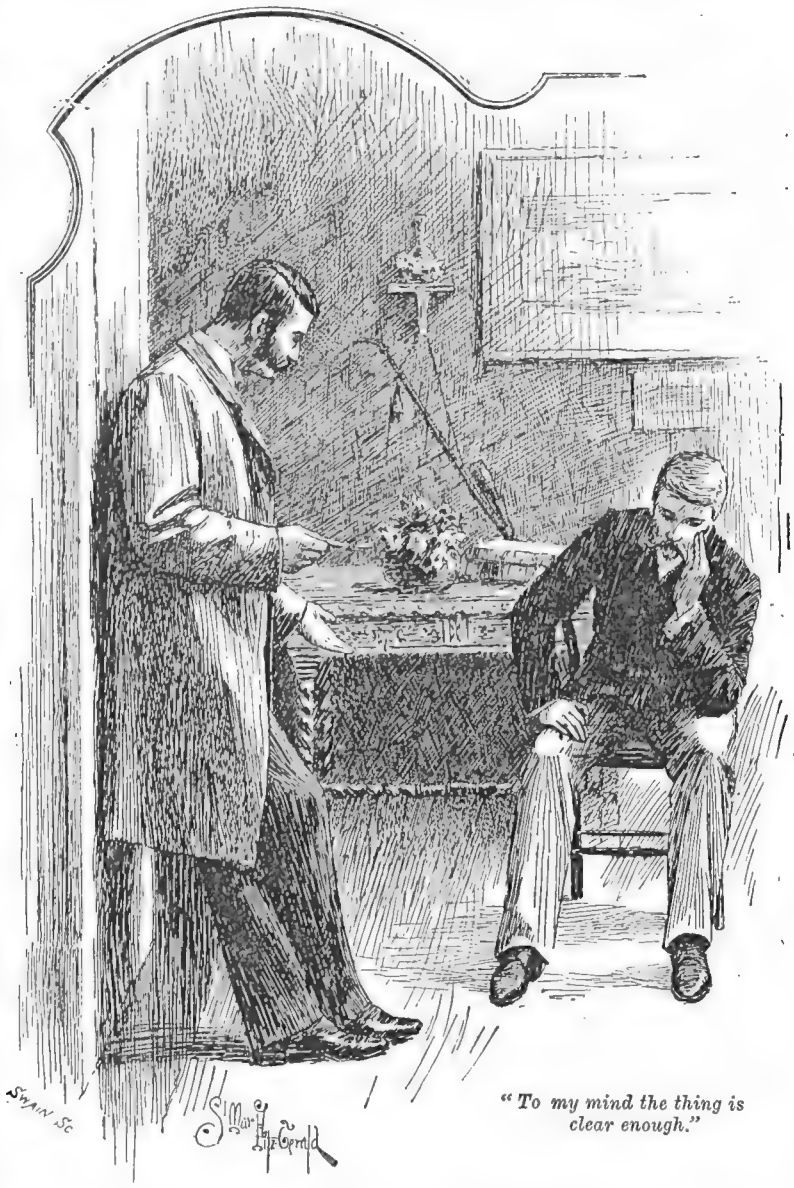
"And how does it strike you? How would you explain the facts?"

"To my mind the thing is clear enough," answered Paul. "Here is an amiable, but perhaps rather weak young man, who has a love affair with a young woman of stronger will than himself. Perhaps she thought he had used her badly. She hears that he is going to marry another, and she is torn by various passions—love, jealousy, wounded self-esteem, and the rest. She determines that she will make a last attempt to regain what she has lost.

"She knows that Vere will not attend to a message sent in her own name. Therefore she uses her rival's name, and by that means (as the railway guard told you) obtains an interview with Vere. He left the station in her company, and no doubt she succeeded in establishing her old influence over him. She works on his pity, perhaps, or his admiration for her beauty—we know by the sketches you found in his studio that he did admire her greatly.

"Well, next day he realises what he has done—that he has made a return to his old honourable life impossible, that all his old friends will look on him with scorn, that Winifred Denvers is lost to him for ever. He makes no sign, simply because he cannot face his disgrace. He hates himself, and loathes the sight of the woman who has been his ruin.

"They are out walking together in the quietest neighbourhood they can find, when they have a quarrel. Each reproaches the other, until Vere, maddened by the sharp stings of the woman's tongue, and by the sharper stings of remorse, threatens her with the revolver. Perhaps she retorts by some cruel taunt; and then either by accident, or carried away by a gust of passion, he fires. She falls, and he finds that she is dead.



"To my mind the thing is clear enough."

"Concealment or flight is now his only thought. Probably he went back to his lodgings, invented some plausible story to account for his companion's disappearance, and then immediately changed his quarters. Don't you think the course of events must have been something like that?"

Kenyon sighed deeply.

"It seems only too probable," he answered.

"Then, if we search for the poor, unhappy man, and let the light in upon the dark corner where he is hiding, we may simply be handing him over to justice. We must not forget the verdict of the Coroner's jury."

"I don't forget it," said Harold, "but I am more anxious than ever to discover the truth about my old friend; and I can keep his secret if I find it out. There is one man who can throw some light on the matter—the man who dined with Vere at the 'Cock Pheasant' that Tuesday evening. I have a fancy—it is only a fancy, of course—that that man was Arthur Beaumont. Somehow, I was not favourably impressed with that fellow. I shall call on him, and ask him point blank whether he was at the 'Cock Pheasant' with Vere that evening."

"And how will you know whether he tells you the truth?"

"I shall see it in his face."

Shenstone smiled as he answered. "But, my dear fellow,

supposing that your penetration is equal to that strain upon it, you won't be able to prove that he is lying, even though you may feel sure that he is. If you like to leave him to me, I should take a different course with him altogether."

"Why can't I do myself what you advise?" asked Harold quickly.

Shenstone hesitated just a second before he replied.

"Why, you see, you have been at him already about this business, and he knows that you are trying to find Vere. Besides, he may resent your questioning him so much, even if he has nothing to conceal. Now, if it were my place, I should go to him as a client, and ask his advice on some imaginary point. Then I would ask him to lunch. Of course, from obvious motives, he would accept my invitation. I should take him to the 'Cock Pheasant,' and take the waiter aside—stout, sandy-haired man, I think you said——?"

"Capital!" he cried. "You ought to have been a detective."

Kenyon nodded.

"Under pretence of consulting him about the wine. Then I would recall the incident of the overcoat to his mind, point out Beaumont, and ask him if he was the gentleman who was Vere's companion that Tuesday evening. If he said 'No,' I should order some light claret. If he said 'Yes,' I should order a magnum of champagne; and before that lunch was ended I should know all that Beaumont knew about Launcelot Vere."

Kenyon laughed aloud.

"Capital!" he cried. "You ought to have been a detective. I should be really very much obliged if you will call on Beaumont for me, and get the necessary information out of him, particularly as I have to be in the City nearly the whole day. I won't dream of suggesting ways and means to you, for you are evidently much better up to this sort of work than I am. Only let me know the result of your investigations, and I shall be infinitely obliged to you."

Shenstone readily undertook to do what was asked of him, and promised to call at the hotel that evening, and let Kenyon know what he had done and how much he had learned.

CHAPTER XVI.

A Stab in the Dark.

On the evening of the next day Shenstone drove up to the hotel at which Kenyon was staying.

"I'm in a dreadful hurry," he said, the moment Harold made his appearance. "I am going home to-night, and I have barely time to catch the night express. I just looked in for a moment, as I said I would come and tell you the result of my interview with Beaumont."

"Have you seen him?" interrupted Harold.

"Yes, I have; and I find you are entirely wrong in your idea that he was in Vere's company that Tuesday. The waiter failed to recognise him—said, in fact, he wasn't the man."

Kenyon's face fell.

"Now, my dear fellow, I must be off. I suppose I shall see you down in Darnport to-morrow or next day?"

"No," said Harold abruptly, "I mean to stay here until I ferret out something satisfactory about Vere. It is quite clear that he never expected to see Miss Unwin when he went to Paddington that Tuesday evening, and much less did he intend to elope with her. I want to know how it was that (if your theory is the true one) he came to be dining, not in her company, but with some stranger, within an hour of his meeting her. I want to discover who that stranger was, and when and where he last saw Launcelot Vere. And, in short, I want to find Vere; and I shall not rest until I do find him."

"I thought you had agreed with me that it might be better, for your friend's own sake, not to try to discover his place of concealment," said Shenstone.

"Not exactly," said Kenyon. "You suggested that it might be so; and the point had occurred to me before; but I don't think there is any real danger to Vere in my seeking for him. The police need not know anything of my actions. And he may be in need of my help. At any rate, I mean to find him."

"Well," said Shenstone after a pause, "I can only say again, that if I can aid you in any way you have only to say the word. You will keep me informed of what steps you take, and I can come up again if necessary. I suppose you must go back to Darnport before long."

"I mean to stay in London till this mystery is cleared up," said Harold.

"And what will——"

Shenstone checked himself suddenly and looked at his watch.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "I must be off at once if I mean to catch my train. Good-bye again. Be sure to wire me if anything turns up."

In less than a minute Shenstone was driving away from the hotel at a rapid rate.

Besides his old friendship with Vere, Kenyon had another reason for determining to prosecute his search for the missing man. He had had a letter from Winnie Denvers, telling him, in answer to the telegram he had sent to Kate, that she had never telegraphed to Vere that she was going to London. And in this letter the poor girl's anxiety as to her lover's fate was so pathetically revealed, that Kenyon's heart was touched; and he swore to himself that, if patience and determination could accomplish the task, Vere should be found. That is, if he were still alive; for Harold had often wondered sadly if his friend had not been murdered, or killed in some accident. But it seemed very unlikely that Vere, who had never been known to take too much liquor, had fallen into bad company; he was not known to have a single enemy; and as for accident, had his body been found, the fact must long ago have been reported to the police. Whether he was dead or alive, Kenyon was resolved that he would find out the truth.

"Rather an unpleasant letter."

For some days, however, he was unable to make any progress in his quest. The greater part of his time was necessarily spent in the City, for he was now employed in business connected with the bank. But his chief difficulty was to know how he could take the first step towards the accomplishment of the task he had set himself. There seemed to be an impenetrable darkness on every side. Jane Unwin had been buried, but no one had

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come forward to say where she had been living these last few days of her life. Kenyon sometimes thought with a shudder that Shenstone's theory of what must have happened seemed by far the most likely one.

One morning, when Kenyon went down to the bank in Threadneedle Street, he was told that Mr. Bonnington had returned, and shortly afterwards he was asked to step into the partners' private room.

As soon as he entered the apartment, he saw that something was amiss. The three partners were seated round a large table, and they looked at their district manager coldly. Even Mr. Bonnington, Harold's friend, merely nodded towards him, and did not offer him his hand as usual.

"Take a seat, Mr. Kenyon," said Mr. Carr, the senior partner.

"We have had rather an unpleasant letter this morning," he continued after a short pause, "from a solicitor in your part of the world. He complains that he had a client who wished to transact some important business with us, and that he called at the branch bank at Darnport several times, three or four weeks ago, and did not succeed in finding anyone capable of attending to it. He also says that he called several times lately about the same matter, but found you were still from home, and that his client, being annoyed at the delay, has determined to go elsewhere for the money he wanted. Now, we know that you have been in town attending to our affairs for the last few days; but your earlier absence without leave requires to be explained. You can see for yourself that it is a serious matter. We are newly established in Darnport, and cannot afford to lose business. Still less can we afford to have it said that our manager does not care to get customers. What have you to say?"

Kenyon's face had alternately reddened and grown pale while Mr. Carr was speaking. The only days he had been absent from business had been those he had spent in London making inquiries about Vere; and he bitterly regretted that he had not asked leave, or at least mentioned the fact, without waiting for Mr. Bonnington's return. It was too late now to rectify the error.

"It is quite true," he said, "that a short time ago I was absent from my post for two or three days, perhaps three or four days, on urgent business of a private nature." He paused for a moment, asking himself whether he should be more explicit; and then remembering the terrible charge that was hanging over Vere's head, he thought it wiser not to enter into details. "I admit that it was an irregularity, and that I ought to have asked leave; but the matter was so urgent that, to tell the truth, it did not occur to me to do so."

No one made any reply to this apology; and Kenyon understood that his explanation was not deemed quite satisfactory.

"I am afraid," he said, drawing himself up, "that I can offer no better excuse for my conduct; but if you wish it I am ready to tender my resignation."

"You are going too fast, Mr. Kenyon," said the senior partner. "We have been perfectly well satisfied with your conduct hitherto; and we should not think of asking you to resign for a matter which, in itself, is not of very great importance. But we cannot help blaming you for being absent without leave, and we must insist that it shall not occur again. On that understanding we are willing that, as soon as the business you have now on hand is finished, you should go back to Darnport and resume your duties."

With these words Mr. Carr turned to his desk as if no more need be said on the subject.

Harold accepted the reproof in silence. He rose from his chair, bowed, and turned to leave the room.

But before reaching the door he stopped short.

"It seems very extraordinary to me," he said, "that anyone should have called at the bank at Darnport, even once, not to say several times, without my being informed of it. I don't understand how it can have happened."

"Well, you see it *has* happened," said Mr. Carr; "all I ask is, don't let it happen again."

"May I ask the name of your correspondent, sir?"

"Certainly not," returned the banker with some asperity. "The business he came to introduce to our firm has gone elsewhere, so it would be useless to follow it up. Our correspondent asks us not to mention his name; and I consider that it would be a breach of confidence to do so."

Harold bowed a second time, and left the room.

As he passed through the public part of the establishment Kenyon saw his old friend Mr. Daunt standing at the

"Heard any news of your mysterious friend?"

counter. He stopped a moment on his way out to ask after the old lawyer's health.

"Well? Never was better in my life," responded Mr. Daunt. "Just wait till I get this cheque cashed, and I will go along the street with you. Heard any news of your mysterious friend?" he asked.

"Not exactly, but I picked up a bit of information about him in rather a curious way," answered Kenyon; and he told his companion of the telegram he had found.

"And now," he continued, "the provoking part of it is that just when I had resolved to throw my whole energy into the search for Vere, I am ordered back to Darnport, where I shan't be able to do anything. I have a great mind to throw up my post rather than consent to return at this juncture. I had intended to ask for a month's leave of absence; but, after what happened this morning, it would be useless to make a request of that sort."

Mr. Daunt threw a glance at Harold which said: "What happened this morning?" and Harold told him what had transpired in the partners' private room.

"Humph!" said the old lawyer. "Very careless of your subordinates, I must say, not to tell you of these visits on your return."

"That's the strange part of it," said Kenyon. "Green, my cashier, is a most careful man. It is inconceivable that he should have allowed any one, especially a solicitor, to call several times without putting the visits down in the call-book."

"Indeed?" queried the lawyer, with a quick look at his friend.

"He is a model of carefulness," said Kenyon.

"Then I should telegraph to him and make inquiries," said Mr. Daunt. "Come up to my office and tell me what reply you get; I am curious to know what it is."

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CHAPTER XVII.

In which Kenyon does a little Detective Work on his own Account.

Two hours later Harold burst into Mr. Daunt's room in a state of considerable excitement.

"Green assures me positively," he cried, "that no such

'Then you think——?" he began.

visits as Mr. Carr told me of were paid at our bank while I was away. Here is his telegram. He says: 'I know all solicitors within fifty miles. No one called in your absence except the three I mentioned to you.' Isn't that rather singular?"

"Some people might think so," said the lawyer with one of his peculiar smiles.

"What do you mean?" asked Harold.

"Only that I am not very much surprised at the reply you have got. I should have been surprised if it had been the other way."

"Why? How on earth——?"

"Didn't it strike you that that was an odd sort of letter for a solicitor to write?"

"Well, yes; I thought some spiteful fellow had done it."

"Have you an enemy among the members of our fraternity down there?"

"Not one, that I am aware of."

"Humph! Have you a friend among them, then? Anyone you could count on to do you a service?"

"Certainly. There's young Cresswell, a better fellow never lived. He would do anything for me."

Mr. Daunt went to a bookcase and took down a law list.

"Here is a list of the attorneys practising in Darnport and the surrounding district," he said. "You will be able, I suppose, to tell offhand that some of them could not have written that letter?"

"Certainly."

"Just make me out a list of those who might possibly, so far as you know, have done such a thing."

In ten minutes the list was ready.

"Now," said Mr. Daunt, "you had better telegraph to your friend Cresswell, and ask him to see every one of those men, and ask whether he called on you at such and such a time. You can write by to-night's post and explain more fully."

"Mr. Daunt," said Harold, in a hesitating way, "you are very kind indeed to interest yourself so much about my affairs; but it seems to me a pity to waste my friend's time and my own in following this thing up. Someone has played me a shabby trick; but I am not particularly anxious to find out who did it."

The old lawyer looked down and smiled.

"I think you ought to sift this matter to the bottom," said he.

"Why?"

"Because, when you find out the man who wrote that letter to your employers——" Mr. Daunt paused and looked his visitor full in the face.

"Yes?" asked Harold with a smile. "When I find him out, what then?"

The lawyer put his arms on the table, leant forward, and looked with his glittering blue eyes into Harold's face.

"Then," he said, "then, perhaps, you will put your finger on the secret of your friend Vere's disappearance."

Kenyon started violently, and drew back in his chair.

"Then you think——?" he began.

"I think that somebody is very anxious that you should give up this quest, and go back to your quiet life at Darnport. And I think, too, that he has taken a tolerably effectual way of securing his object."

Harold jumped to his feet, struck the table with his fist so that a cloud of dust rose from the bundles of papers lying on it, seized the list of names which he had written, wrung his friend's hand, and hurried out of the office.

Next day he received the following telegram:

"Have seen all whose names you wired, except three who were on holiday all last month and have not returned, and other two. All deny calling on you, I have no doubt sincerely. The other two are Williams, very unlikely, and Simpson. Simpson now in London. Can't get his town address, but agents, Clover and Fry, Newgate Street. Better try to find him."

Kenyon immediately acted on his friend's advice.

He went to Messrs. Clover and Fry's; and though they had not seen Mr. Simpson lately, they were able to tell him that that gentleman, when he came to town, usually stayed at Duncannon's Hotel in Holborn.

A gentleman who had evidently been dining freely.

To Duncannon's Hotel Kenyon betook himself, and learnt to his great satisfaction, that Mr. Simpson was actually staying there. He was not in, however, and it was impossible to tell when he would return. This, Kenyon thought, mattered little. It was already late in the afternoon; and he decided to dine at the hotel and wait there till Simpson should turn up.

Harold lingered over his dinner as long as he could, and, then adjourned to the smoking-room. He did not give his name to the "lady manager," but tipped one of the waiters,

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and obtained from him a promise that he would let him know the moment Mr. Simpson returned. It was part of Kenyon's plan that Simpson should believe that his presence at the hotel was purely accidental.

Hour after hour went by, and Harold had perused (often with hardly an idea of what he was reading) every paper in the establishment, and yet the solicitor did not make his appearance.

At last, about half-past ten, the friendly waiter ushered into the smoking-room a gentleman who had evidently been dining freely. A glance told Harold that it was Simpson. He remembered having seen his face—the face of a cunning and unscrupulous man — in the streets of Darnport.

At the sight of Kenyon, the lawyer dropped on a lounge, and then, hastily rising, seemed about to leave the room.

But Kenyon rose and went up to him.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Simpson?" he said. "Don't you remember me? My name's Kenyon. I'm manager of the bank at Darnport, you know."

"Mr. Kenyon! To be sure, sir! I hope I see you well, Mr. Kenyon."

"Very well, thanks. May I offer you a cigar?"

To Harold's great satisfaction Simpson accepted the cigar and sat down, calling at the same time for whisky and soda.

After a little talk about nothing in particular, Kenyon thought it was time to open fire.

"I was sorry I was out when you called the other day at the bank," he said. "You came two or three times, I believe, without finding me in."

If the lawyer had had his wits about him he might perhaps have been ready with some lie that would have served his purpose for the moment; but taken unawares as he was, he allowed his face to betray him.

He looked surprised, afraid, bewildered, all at the same moment. It was all he could do to mutter something about "a mistake."

"Then you have *not* been calling at the bank at Darnfort lately?"

"No—not for some time."

"Why, then, did you write to my principals and pretend that you had tried to see me several times in vain, and had been forced to take your business elsewhere? Don't deny the fact, Mr. Simpson! I *know* you wrote that letter," said Kenyon firmly. There was evidence enough in the lawyer's face that the accusation brought against him was just.

He muttered something that was quite inaudible.

"You are a solicitor," continued Harold. "Did it not strike you that it might be rather a dangerous thing to slander a man to his employers in that way? If I lose my post an action would lie, eh? No doubt of that I imagine."

"Upon my word, Mr.—a—Mr. Kenyon, I admit nothing, you understand; but speaking strictly in confidence, and without prejudice, you understand, I am certain that it was a mere joke."

"Pretty kind of joke—rather an expensive one for some people, perhaps. But who got you to do it? Who asked you to write that letter to my principals?"

"Me, Mr. Kenyon! I never wrote any letter!"

"Oh, very well, we must prove the handwriting, that's all."

The solicitor turned greenish, and Harold went on.

"But if you choose to tell who played this trick on me, I will promise you that he shall never find out that you informed against him, and also that you shall hear no more of this matter."

The promise of indemnity broke down the attorney's last scruples.

"I'm a poor man, Mr. Kenyon," he said; "and twenty pounds aren't to be come by every day. It was only a harmless jest, he said, or I'd never have consented to do it. But I think you said that no harm had been done?"

"That has to be seen," said Harold. "But I promise you that if you give me the true name, *you* shall not suffer. *Now*, who is it?"

The frightened little man glanced around, as if fearful that some one should overhear him; then, bending over, he put his lips to Kenyon's ear and whispered the name "*Paul Shenstone.*"

Whispered the name "Paul Shenstone."

(*To be continued.*)

THE FRESH AIR FUND

was started by the editor of *Pearson's Weekly* and *Short Stories* in 1892. During the summer of 1892 20,600 poor children enjoyed a day in the country through its agency; in 1893, 40,230; in 1894, 74,074; and last summer, 92,061.

The total expenses for travelling and two splendid meals amount to ninepence only per day for each child. All the expenses of management are defrayed by the promoters of the F.A.F. Each ninepence, therefore, contributed by a reader of *Short Stories* gives to one child a day's complete happiness.

This year we hope to send more than 100,000 children for a day in the country. And to do this we shall require all the assistance that our readers can give us.

In past years the subscribers to *Short Stories* have been most generous in helping to swell the Fresh Air Fund total. We are looking towards them to help us still more this summer.

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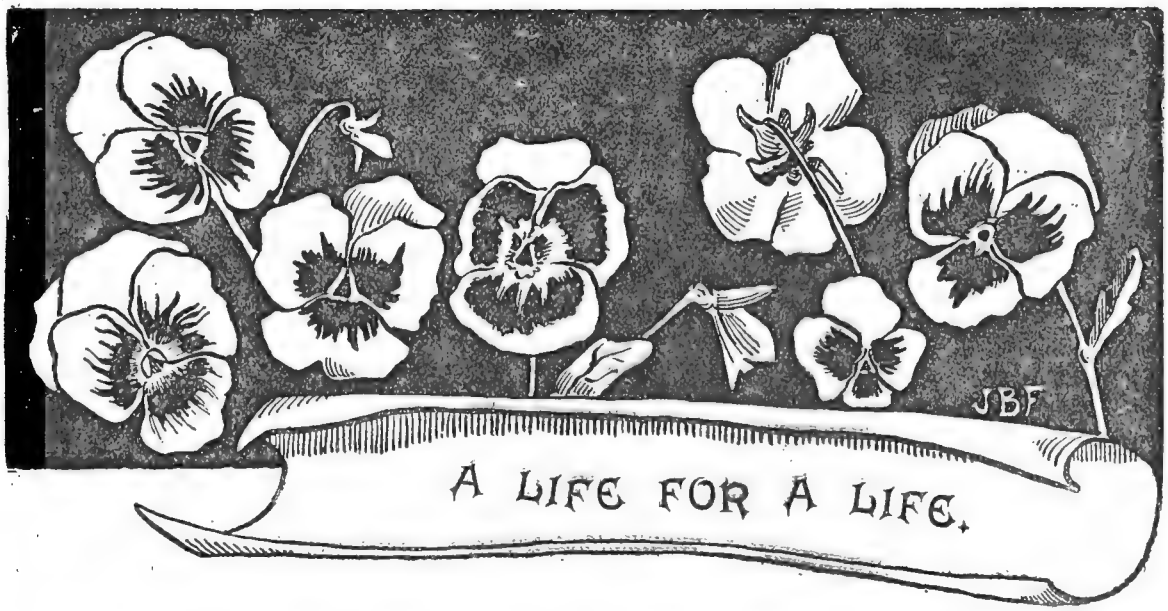

I AM going to give the history of the whole affair to the world. I am perfectly calm and reasonable as I sit down to write, though my head is burning, and my hands are icy cold. And I think that people ought to know the truth; for the way that things have turned out with me may serve as a warning to others who may be tempted hereafter, as I was so many years ago.

I was Dr. Sennet's only child; and, after the death of my mother, though I was still a mere girl, I was given full authority to rule over his shoulders. I was, too, almost his sole companion, as he was mine.

He was a very studious man, much absorbed in the theoretical part of his profession, and greatly given to trying new drugs, and to seeking for remedies as yet undiscovered. All the time that he could spare from the active practice of medicine he devoted for years to experiments and researches as to the curative properties of all sorts and substances, herbs and minerals forming the chief.

He had a theory that the healing as well as the destructive properties of certain poisons only lacked careful study and development to become of vast practical value, and he devoted a great deal of time to this branch of his researches.

Serpent venom was one of the forms of deadly product on which he based some of his most novel theories. He maintained that a substance of such terrific power for slaying must have equal power as a remedy, if only one could find out for what disease it was to be used, and in what manner it was to be employed.

But what discoveries he made in this direction died with him. He made me always his companion and his confidante in the more important of his researches.

Some months before his death, he placed in my hands a large, old-fashioned pocket-book, bidding me lock it up and keep it safely for him.

"I do not like," he went on to say, "to keep it in my consulting room, or even in my safe; for its contents are so powerful for mischief, that accident on my part, or design on that of some evil-doer, might bring about a terrible catastrophe."

Then he made me sit down beside him and showed me what it was that the pocket-book contained.

It was a series of little packets, of the shape and size of an ordinary teething powder, each neatly folded in white paper, and inscribed with the name and properties of the contents.

My good father had every reason to surround this one of his scientific possessions with unusual care and watchfulness, for each one of these harmless looking little packets contained some dried specimens of the venom of a deadly serpent, the poison that renders the puncture of a snake's fang as deadly as a dagger thrust to the heart, or as a bullet through the brain.

There, in little yellowish, semi-transparent scales, looking like chips of horn, were samples of the venom of the cobra-di-capello, and the krait, and the coral snake, and the lemon snake of India, of the dreaded lance-head of the West India Islands, and of the copper-head spread-adder and rattlesnake of America, besides specimens from other deadly reptiles whose names I had never even heard.

"In their present form, Hester, these specimens are harmless," said my father, as he replaced the papers in the pocket-book; "but a drop or two of warm water, let fall on those innocent looking little scales, would prepare it to mingle with the blood of any living creature, and would suffice to call forth in full power all its fatal properties. Therefore, once more I beg of you to guard very carefully this pocket-book. Its contents are invaluable to me, as I mean to use them in a series of experiments that I am now making on the effects of poisons that act through the blood; so I am anxious, also, not to have them mislaid."

"Come with me, father," I said, "and I will show you where and how safely I will keep this precious deposit."

So I took him to my own room, and unlocked an old-fashioned desk that had belonged to my mother, and revealed to him, concealed in its inmost depths, a

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secret drawer, the existence of which had never been known to its original owner, but which I had found out one day when I had overturned the desk by accident.

He was perfectly satisfied with this place of deposit for his precious collection; so I put it in the drawer and locked the desk again, and never saw or touched the pocket-book any more for many a long day.

Some little time afterwards my father showed me a clipping from an old newspaper—a genuine snake story of the old-fashioned kind. It was the account of a farmer in America who owned a pair of strong leather boots, in which he went one day to inspect a distant pasture. That night, on pulling them off, he remarked to his wife that there must have been a thorn in the leather, as something had scratched his leg. He was taken ill that night and died mysteriously after a very brief illness. His eldest son took possession of the boots, and wore them at the funeral; he, too, died as suddenly and strangely as his father had done. Next, his brother wore the boots, and he, too, fell a victim to some mysterious ailment. The boots were then cut open and examined. Inside the leg of one of them was found protruding the fang of a rattlesnake, the reptile having evidently essayed to bite, and the tooth having broken off in the leather.

"I rather doubt the truth of this story," said my father, when he had finished reading it to me. "The fang of a rattlesnake is hardly strong enough to pierce through leather and, presumably, through a stocking underneath. A metal point dipped in the poison might probably work as much mischief in that way, as its penetrating powers would be so much greater; but scarcely the snake's tooth itself."

But I forgot all about these things when, a few weeks later, my father died very suddenly from an attack of pneumonia, caught by returning through a drenching rain from the bedside of a patient who was dangerously ill; and I was left alone in the world.

I was a little over eighteen when his death took place, and, in accordance with a wish expressed by him on his death-bed, and embodied in the last letter that he ever wrote, my aunt, Mrs. Forbes—my father's widowed sister—came, with her only child, a daughter a year younger than myself, to take up her residence with me.

I fretted greatly against this arrangement, for I felt myself fully capable of looking after my own affairs. And, moreover, I was not very fond either of my aunt or of my cousin Laura. I was a reserved, self-contained young woman, older than my years, both in aspect and character, and devoted to the study of science and to scientific pursuits. My Aunt Caroline and my cousin spent their time in fancy-work and novel reading, to my infinite if concealed disdain. To be sure, my aunt was fond of pottering about the kitchen, and of making pastry and preserves and all sorts of delicate dishes; and Laura contrived to accomplish a great deal of sewing, besides studying French and music. She had, I must confess, a very sweet voice, and sang like a bird. But they were neither of them congenial to me; and, though we got along fairly together, I never ceased to miss the father whose constant companion I had been from my childhood, nor to mourn for his loss.

My aunt, on the day of her arrival, had folded me in her arms and had begged me to consider her as a mother and Laura as a sister; but I could not persuade myself into such a comfortable state of feeling. We were none of us quarrelsome, and so we never quarrelled, and that was the best that could be said of our intercourse.

I spent most of my time, as I had done during my father's lifetime, in chemical experiments, the most practical and least peculiar of which were my attempts at photography.

But I liked to try to carry out some of his unfinished researches into the nature and effects of certain poisons. That branch of medical study possessed for me a singular fascination, though I cannot say that my experiments ever resulted in any startling discoveries.

In the meantime, my aunt and cousin were happy after their own fashion. They made gowns, and wore them, they went out to pay calls as soon as their mourning was laid aside, and they received callers on one day in the week, and they had a deal of talk together over their sewing in their sitting-room upstairs.

Then, too, Laura pursued her studies, as she called them, in a very persevering fashion. She pored over French grammars and dictionaries, and translated passages from the works of Victor Hugo, and practised two hours a day at little foolish songs all about dreaming and dying, so far as I could make out the words. And that was what she called study!

There have been people who said that I never liked Laura because she was so much prettier than I was. But that was all nonsense; I never cared about my own looks.

I knew that my tall, spare figure, deep set, dark grey eyes, very marked features and sallow complexion were all of too masculine a type to attract much admiration; so I never troubled my head as to how I looked or what I wore, and used to turn a deaf ear to all my aunt's mild remonstrances on the subject of the stains left by chemicals or acids upon my luckless figure, and would resist all Laura's playful efforts to remove them. What did it matter if my strong, bony hands were dyed copper-colour one day, and streaked with black the next? They were not handsome at any time. If they had been little and white, and delicately formed like Laura's, they might have been worth taking care of. But I never was jealous of Laura's charms—no, not for a single moment, until—well, I shall tell you about that later.

And yet she was the prettiest creature I had ever seen in all my life—tall and slender, with a swaying, lily-like grace in all her movements, and a transparent complexion whose wild-rose tints varied with every breath that she drew, and great, soft brown eyes with a look like that of a startled fawn in their depths. She had, too, such lovely golden hair, that curled over her brow in little silken rings like those of a baby. Then she had a deep dimple in each cheek, and a long, delicate throat, with a way of carrying her head like that of a young deer. So, altogether, she was very lovely. I never denied the fact—never!

And she was very good-tempered, too. I really think we never had a quarrel but once, and that was when I tried some experiments on her dog, a cur that she had taken charge of because it followed her home one day when she was returning from a walk, and because it looked cold and starved. The dog died, it is true, and Laura cried for two days about it, and would not speak to me for a week afterwards. However, we made it all up, on my promise never to meddle again with any of her pets.

But to this day I cannot understand why she cared so much for a common, ugly creature like that. And my experiment had a wholly satisfactory result. It proved to me that the little yellowish scales contained in the packet marked "Rattlesnake Venom," from the old pocket-book, had lost none of their power. Just a drop

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of warm water on one of them, and the point of a penknife-blade dipped in the viscous fluid thus produced, and a scratch across the animal's quivering, black nose as he was jumping up on my lap—a practice he had, which I much disliked—and good-bye, Tray!

It was more than a year after my father's death that Dr. Adrian Trent first came to take up his residence in our little town of Upton.

Till that time there had been some talk of a successor to Dr. Sennet's practice, but no competitor had presented himself before who had been considered satisfactory. But Dr. Trent had studied in Paris and Berlin after taking his degree, and, but for a constitutional delicacy of health which caused him to avoid the fatigue incidental to a physician's life in a large town, he might readily, with his talent and his engaging address, have made his way to the first rank of his profession. But he preferred the quiet, semi-rural life of a small town like ours.

He had known my father well by reputation, and had often corresponded with him on professional subjects, so he was quite prepared to accept us all as acquaintances. He was a noble looking man, tall and straight of figure, with a countenance that was at once winning and intellectual.

He was unmarried, and his mother had gone to live with his married sister in Ireland; so he was left, so to speak, alone in the world. And, as we were almost the only persons that he knew when he first came to Upton, we naturally saw a good deal of him.

He used to drop in very often of an evening, to talk about my scientific experiments and the medical discoveries of the day with me, and to look over some of my father's notes in manuscript, which I was very glad to show him; and to listen to Laura's music when the talk about new remedies and curious cases became wearisome to him.

It never tired me. I was born, I think, with a genuine talent for the study of medicine, and it was my sole passion till the love that comes to every woman's nature, either as a curse or a blessing, awoke to life in my heart.

I do not know when it was that I first began to love Adrian Trent. He had not been visiting very long at our house before the gossips of the neighbourhood got talking about the fitness of a match between the new doctor and the daughter of the old one; what a good thing it would be for Dr. Trent to marry a girl with a comfortable fortune like myself—for I had been left an heiress in a small way—and how congenial such a marriage would be between the rising physician and myself, my scientific tastes and pursuits being well known.

Of course, this chit-chat could not fail to reach my ears, and I listened to it at first incredulously, and then with a secret delight. For Dr. Trent did assuredly single me out to talk to, and even to consult concerning certain vexed questions in his profession. And then, everybody was exhorting him to take a wife. "You will never get on till you are married, doctor—never! A single man may make his way in other professions, but never in that of medicine!" And, strong-minded and self-contained as I had always been, I suffered myself to yield my whole soul up to the intoxicating dream of loving, and of being loved.

In proportion to the delight and the absorbing nature of the vision was the pang of my awakening.

I shall never forget the evening when my delusion was dispelled.

It was a warm night in June, and I had been suffering all day from a violent headache, which had kept me a prisoner in my own room, and had baffled all my efforts to relieve it. I was particularly anxious to go downstairs, as Dr. Trent had informed me that he meant to call; but the pain and its accompanying sickness had prevented me from even leaving my bed.

I heard the door-bell ring, and the little bustle that announced the arrival of the expected visitor, with a dull feeling of regret; and then I think I must have fallen asleep, for the next thing that I knew was Laura's presence beside my bed, and her tears and kisses on my cheeks, as she whispered:

"Hester! dear Hester! I wanted to be the first to tell you—Dr. Trent and I are engaged to be married. Wish me joy, will you not? I am so happy!"

Well, I congratulated her in due, set terms, my illness serving as an excuse for any coldness or lack of enthusiasm in my words, and also for the wan visage wherewith I presented myself at the breakfast table the next morning, after a sleepless night, filled with bitter repinings, and a fierce struggle against what then seemed to me to be inevitable.

I could not for a moment imagine that a frivolous piano-playing, novel-reading girl like my cousin really could care for an intellectual man like Dr. Trent, or would make him a good wife. But he loved Laura, and he meant to marry Laura, and what was I to do? I could only rage against the decrees of destiny, for as yet I saw no way of setting aside those decrees.

My Aunt Caroline was in the seventh heaven of delight and joyful anticipation, and her raptures, which were openly and continually expressed, nearly deprived me of my senses. She could talk of nothing, all day long, but Laura's engagement, and Laura's approaching marriage, of the little house that Dr. Trent meant to take near the post-office, and of the furniture that his mother was going to give him, and of all the details of the trousseau, till, sometimes, I fairly left the house to escape from these endless talks upon the one recurrent theme.

But worse even than my aunt's chatter was the spectacle that I had continually before my eyes, of the mutual love and happiness of the engaged couple.

If I had not had Dr. Trent's betrothed bride as an inmate of my own home, I think I might in time have grown used to the mental contemplation of his future marriage. But I was forced to witness daily the passionate devotion of the man, that I loved with such fervour and concentration of feeling, bestowed upon another woman.

Often and often I have stolen to my own room with clenched hands, and eyes from which the tears were all scorched away by the fever of my torment, only to pace the floor unceasingly, and to ask from Providence for an escape from my jealous misery. For I grudged every glance, every word, every caress that Adrian bestowed upon Laura. And yet, let me do him justice now if never before; he had not once, in the slightest degree, given me any cause to fancy that he loved me. I was a congenial companion to him, a good comrade, and nothing more.

But time went on, as it always does, even though, like the wheel of Juggernaut's car, it crushes out life, or peace, or human happiness in its pitiless progress.

The wedding-day was fixed for the tenth of September, and that date drew near; and nothing happened to prevent or even to postpone the marriage, as I, in my wild, impotent despair, had prayed that there would.

A week earlier the bridal dress arrived from London. It was simple and inexpensive, as suited the limited means of my aunt; but it was very dainty and aerial,

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being all in soft clouds of transparent muslin, profusely trimmed with some exquisitely fine Valenciennes lace which Mrs. Forbes had kept amongst her treasures for many years.

All the accessories of the dress, such as the orange-blossom wreath, the ample veil of tulle, the white gloves, etc., had been forwarded with it. Also, there came a pair of white silk stockings, of cobweb fineness, and a pair of white satin slippers. These last were the only unsatisfactory adjuncts of the toilette. They fitted perfectly, and were of Parisian make and style; but the shoemaker had neglected to place a bow or rosette of ribbon on the instep, and both Mrs. Forbes and Laura disliked the untrimmed looks of the delicate little shoes.

"I have an idea, Laura," suddenly exclaimed my aunt; "suppose you wear those pretty shoe-buckles that belonged to my grandmother. Such things are all the fashion now, I believe; and they are as pretty as possible, and genuine antiques as well. I'll get them out, and will polish them up, and then we will try their effect."

So the buckles were produced, and were cleaned with whitening, and then rubbed into brightness with a bit of chamois leather, and were pronounced perfectly lovely, and just the thing, by both the mother and the daughter.

Laura's deft fingers soon fastened them into place, and then she put on the shoes to see how the new adornment looked.

"Ah-h-h!" she cried, with a little grimace, "how I have pricked my foot! One of the teeth of the left-hand buckle must be bent out of place. Yes, I see. I must straighten it out before the day comes for me to wear the shoes."

And actually, when she took off the shoe, there was a tiny drop of blood visible on her white-thread stocking.

I once heard a very pious lady remark that she fully believed in the existence of a personal devil. If there was any truth in her belief, the fiend assuredly stood behind me at that moment, whispering suggestions of wickedness in my ear. For, as Laura spoke, and laughingly showed me the little puncture in her white skin as she drew off her stocking, it seemed to me as though something or somebody said to me, distinctly, if inaudibly:

"Anoint the sharp protruding point with the serpent's venom, and Adrian Trent will be free almost as soon as he is fettered."

I started, and shrank away in horror from the very idea; but the whisper went on and on, and pursued me to my own room, and haunted me in my dreams, till I found myself caressing the thought as one might fondle a dangerous animal that had come to crouch at one's feet, and was ready to tear and slay at the word of command.

Even before I had decided to yield to the hideous temptation, I had taken the old pocket-book from its hiding place in my mother's desk, and had chosen out and concealed the paper marked "Rattlesnake Venom," so as to have it already for use in case I made up my mind to use it. Of course, to such mental yieldings and toyings with a criminal intent, there could be but one ending.

The night before the wedding, I rose from my bed about midnight, and stole softly into the next room to mine—our spare-room, where all the bridal finery was spread out all ready for her use.

On the bed lay the dress, with the filmy, vaporous veil falling beside it like a streak of mist, and the gloves and fan in close proximity; and on the dressing-table stood the satin slippers, with their jewelled buckles sparkling in the moonlight.

One of these, the shoe for the left foot, I carried off to my own room. Just a touch, to bend out a little further the sharp tooth of the buckle, and then a coating of yellow, viscous fluid, applied freely with a camel's-hair brush from the hollow of an old pomatum-pot that stood on my chest of drawers, and my work was done. Death, as well as the bride, would stand erect in those dainty shoes on the wedding day.

I went back and replaced the shoe, and I carried the brush and the gallipot to the kitchen, where I thrust them deep down into the smouldering hollows of the range fire. Then I went upstairs, to watch the slow hours of the night in a sort of exultation that left no room for wavering in my purpose, or for repentance.

The wedding was a very brilliant affair. Laura looked lovely in her white dress and aerial veil and wreath of orange blossoms, and Dr Trent was the very realisation of a novel writer's ideal of a handsome, happy bridegroom.

They were married by old Dr Crosland, who had presided at my baptism and at the funerals of my parents, and who wound up his few words of exhortation to the young couple by the wish that they might pass together many happy years.

But, before the breakfast that followed the ceremony was at an end, the young bride was taken alarmingly ill. I had heard her whisper to her mother that she must have hurt her foot in some way, as it was paining her acutely; so I was not altogether surprised when, after growing paler and paler, and evidently struggling against her rapidly increasing indisposition, she finally fell back insensible, and was carried from the room by her husband.

He caused her to be taken at once to his new home, the pretty house that he had taken such pleasure in preparing for her reception, as he declared that he wanted to watch over her every hour and every moment of the day till his darling was restored to health.

But she never rallied from the mysterious stupor that had invaded all her being, and she breathed her last before the noon of the day succeeding her marriage day.

I never saw despair comparable to that of Dr. Trent. When his bride of a few hours was hidden from his sight in the grave, he retired to his desolate home and shut himself up to abandon himself to his grief. Weeks passed before he would resume his professional duties.

My aunt, in the first sharp anguish of her bereavement, insisted upon leaving Upton and going to take up her abode with some relatives in Canada. She could not remain, she said, in a place where everything reminded her of her lost darling.

And it was then that I conceived a project eminently fitted, as it seemed to me, to further the purpose which had become the dominant idea of my life—namely, to induce Doctor Trent to make me his wife. I was to invite his mother to make me a visit of indeterminate length which might be indefinitely prolonged. Doctor Trent and I would thus be brought together in a natural, unforced way, for he could hardly help calling to see his mother after her arrival, and I trusted to the influence of time, to our congeniality of tastes and pursuits, and, above all, to the impression that my fortune might create

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on Mrs. Trent, to bring about the result that I so passionately desired.

Everything worked as smoothly as I could have wished. Mrs. Trent accepted my invitation, and her presence had the desired effect of luring her son to my house. Very soon our old terms of comradeship were renewed, and we held many discussions over medical books and periodicals; for the doctor had resumed the practice of his profession with an ardour born of the very blackness of desolation that surrounded him.

I did not fail to set forth, indirectly, to his mother the extent of my fortune, and the details interested her deeply. Not that she was mercenary or grasping—she had consented readily to the marriage of her son with my penniless cousin; but, when so many hundreds per year, and so much solid property in the way of houses and farms, were to be had for the asking—for I made no effort to conceal from her the extent of my interest in Dr. Trent—it was hardly to be imagined that she would not influence him to ask for it.

And then I think that I was really the only person in whose society and conversation he found the slightest pleasure, after the death of Laura. Not that he ever talked to me about her—her name never was mentioned by him to anybody—but we had many subjects in common and I had, moreover, become a great favourite with his mother, whose tastes and peculiarities I studied as I had never done those of anyone since my father's death.

And so it came to pass that, two years after that tragic wedding-day, Dr. Trent asked me, in a calm, business-like manner, if I would consent to become his wife.

Even as I listened to the words, for the hearing of which I had sinned so deeply, I could not but contrast his wooing with the love-making between Laura and himself—all tenderness and blissful folly, and stolen caresses, and sweet, foolish little speeches. But I had gained my point; the one great object of my existence was attained at last.

We were married very quietly, and, after a brief wedding tour, settled down to our home life.

Old Mrs. Trent did not long survive our marriage. She lived just long enough to be made very happy by the birth of a little granddaughter. I gave her name of Elizabeth to my baby. I did not dare to ask my husband what he would like to have the little one called, for I knew very well that his answer would be "Laura."

We had not been married a month before I realised the fact that the image of his dead wife was still enshrined in the very core of his heart, and that all my love and devotion were powerless to dislodge it.

Even the advent of our little Bessie could not lure him to forget the fair creature that he had called his own for a few tragic hours only. Often he would lock himself in his own room for a period of unbroken soltitude, and he would come forth from those lonely musings pale and haggard, as one under the spell of some fatal disease.

I tried to break in upon these dreary self-communings more than once, but was soon made to comprehend, strong-minded and resolute though I am, that there were certain points concerning which Adrian Trent would brook no interference. Otherwise, he was always kind and gentle—in a languid, indifferent way—to me, as well as to the rest of the world. His little daughter was the only being that ever seemed to arouse in him a spark of genuine interest or affection.

I had won my point it is true. I was his wife, and was called by his name, and ruled over his household; but, as for the rest, the dead woman in her grave possessed his heart and soul—not I. Often, in my bitter realisation of the truth, I had been forced to ask myself if it was indeed worth while to have stained my soul with such blackest guilt, to have gained only the dry husks of what had once been the golden grain of love's richest harvest.

When we had been married a little over nine years, even these were taken from me—Adrian died! His illness was typhoid fever, with all its distressing train of symptoms, and alternations of hope and fear, the latter crystallising finally into the fixedness of despair.

I watched over him faithfully, disregarding fatigue, or the fear of infection, to the very last. And yet his last look, his last word, were not given to me. Just before he died, he turned his head from me, and gazed at a vacant space on the other side of the bed; and, with a smile such as I had not seen on his lips through all the years of our wedded life, he sighed: "Laura! Laura!" and so passed away.

And when I came to set my desolate home in order, I found hidden away in the depths of a great closet in the room that my father, and afterwards my husband had used as a study, a small black trunk, whose only contents were the white dress and tulle veil that Laura had worn on the last day of her life—her wedding-day.

With barely a glance at the contents of the trunk, I closed it once more, and locked it, leaving the key tied to one of the handles at the ends. I knew then over what relics, what reminders of dead happiness, my husband had spent so many hours of mournful meditation, and I did not care to disturb them; for, in truth, I could not endure to look again on the garments that for me were fraught with such terrible associations.

It was long before I rallied from the effects of my bereavement; nor do I think I ever should have done so, had it not been for the presence of my little girl. I had something to live for, since Bessie was left to me. She was a winning, bright-eyed, intelligent little creature, full of caresses and pretty ways, and my all-absorbing devotion to my husband found a renewal in the love that I gave to my only child.

I was born to bestow my affections upon few people. Only three persons had ever really taken possession of my heart; my father, Adrian, and now Bessie. And in her growth, and prettiness, and expanding intellect I found consolation for all my sorrows, except that sometimes a sharp thrill of anguish would remind me of that other mother, whose only child—and she, too, a daughter—I had been the means of snatching from her.

Strangely enough, I had been able to stifle all thoughts of the hand I had had in bringing about Laura's death, so long as my husband lived. But when once I had lost him, and was no longer anything in this world except a mother—wifehood and daughterhood both being past—I was haunted by continual reminiscences, not of the woman who had been my rival, and who had won the chief place in the affections of Adrian Trent, but of the fair-haired girl clinging to her mother's neck, with the faint moan: "Oh, mother, mother, I am so very ill! Cannot Adrian save me? Oh, mother, is this death?"

* * * * *

Yesterday was Bessie's birthday. How long ago that seems. Yes, the twelfth of July—a day always to be marked with presents and pleasures. Just thirteen—almost a woman grown. We were more like sisters than mother

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and daughter. I had always taught her myself, from the alphabet up to history and geography, and the higher mathematics. But yesterday was a holiday, because it was her birthday. It was an intensely hot day, and she was suffering from a headache. I was obliged to go out to see my lawyer on important business, so I made her lie down on the sofa in the disused study, as that was a cool and quiet room; and I bade her good-bye with a kiss, and left her with one of her new books—to occupy her, should she feel disinclined to sleep.

I was gone a long time—a very long time—for some hours, in fact. There were deeds to be signed, and new leases to be made out, and papers to be read over, and directions to be given concerning various pieces of property, and I was thoroughly weary before the whole was brought to a satisfactory conclusion. But the lawyer would not listen to my petitions for a postponement of, at least, part of the business.

"It is so seldom that we get hold of you, Mrs. Trent," he said in a laughing way, "that now you are here you must finish up all your affairs."

At last I was released, and I hastened to return home. The sun was setting, and a cool breeze was springing up, so I promised myself the pleasure of taking Bessie for a drive, if her head were no worse. I threw open the door of the old study gaily calling: "Bessie! Bessie!" as I did so.

But the sight that I beheld there froze the words upon my lips, and the life-blood at my heart.

In the centre of the room stood a vision of Laura Forbes as I had last seen her, clad in her bridal array—a white figure, in filmy robes of yellowish lace and crumpled muslin, and on her feet—oh, Heaven! on Bessie's feet, for I recognised the child at a second glance—were the satin slippers, with their glistening buckles. And she tottered forward, and fell into my arms, with just such a weak, hoarse cry as that which had rung in my ears for sixteen years! "Oh, mother, mother!"

I snatched the slippers from her feet. There, on the instep of her left foot, was a drop or two of blood, and a tiny tear in the lace-worked thread stocking, and underneath just a deep scratch, not half an inch in length, with a livid line running upwards towards the ankle. And that was all—and it was death!

I had come too late. The poison had worked its insidious way throughout her system—aided, doubtless, by the heat of the weather—and all my boasted science, with that of the doctors I summoned, was of no avail.

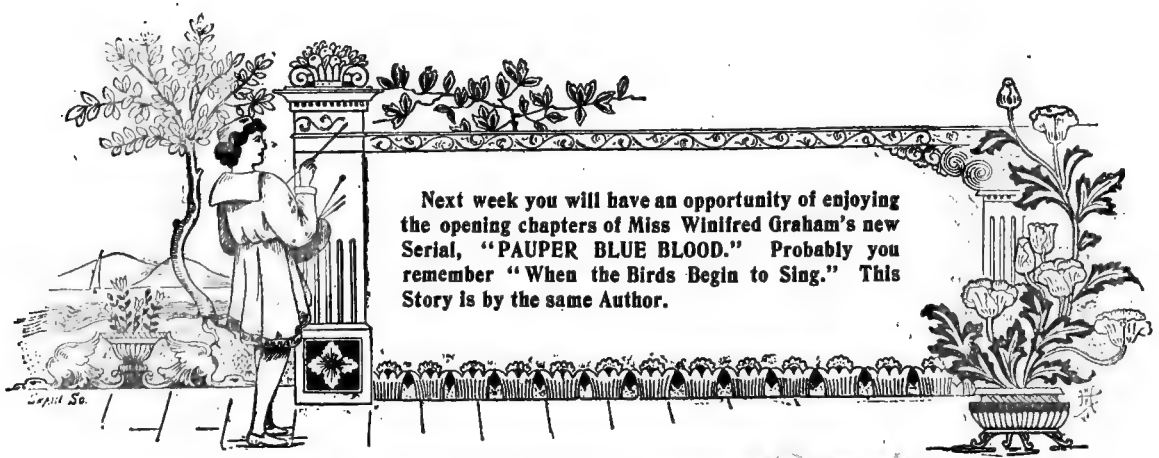
The child, relieved of her headache by rest and slumber, had grown tired of reading, had gone rummaging in the closet, had found the old trunk, with its carefully cherished contents, and had amused herself by dressing up in the garments she had discovered. And so my sin came to find me out, and to exact from me full retribution, for Bessie died last night, and with her departed the last tie that bound me to life.

* * * * *

It is written in the Scriptures. "A life for a life," and also: "He that smiteth with the sword, shall perish by the sword." I mean to do justice on myself, the murderess, and to make use of the same means by which I sent my cousin to an untimely grave. I have set my house in order. I have destroyed the shoe buckles; and I have burned the pocket book, with its death-dealing contents, leaving out only one scale from the paper marked "Rattlesnake Venom." Now for a drop or two of warm water on the little yellowish fragment, and I dip into the solution the point of one of my husband's lancets. So—a mere touch, a puncture of the vein in the hollow of my arm—and my work is done. The lancet is very sharp—it gave me no pain.

I wonder why I am haunted, not by a vision of Bessie's face nor yet of Laura's, but by the remembrance of the wistful brown eyes of the dog that I killed so long ago. I am growing stupid, I think. I will creep into the next room, and take my seat beside the bed where Bessie lies, looking so calm and fair. Is it Bessie, or is it Laura that I see before me, in that crushed wedding dress? Bessie—Laura—Laura—Bessie—you both seem very near to me to-day. And what are those words from Shakespeare that keep ringing in my ears? "Sharper than a serpent's tooth"—sharp as a serpent's tooth—sharp——

Arnold Weevil.


Next week you will have an opportunity of enjoying the opening chapters of Miss Winifred Graham's new Serial, "PAUPER BLUE BLOOD." Probably you remember "When the Birds Begin to Sing." This Story is by the same Author.

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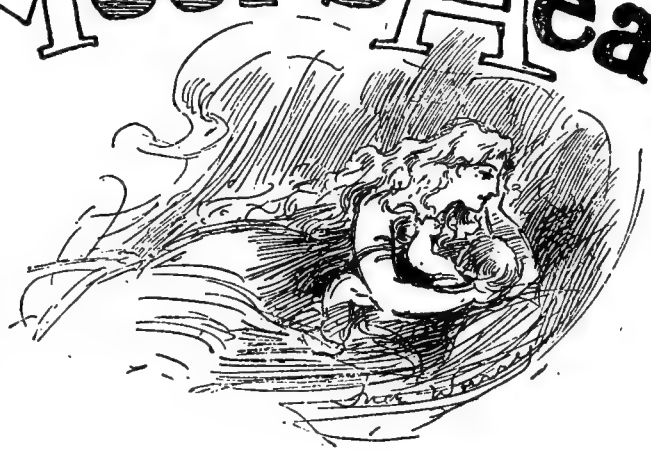
The Moor's Head



"Curses are nonsensical at all times, Thorndyke, and to talk of them descending from generation to generation—bah!" and the speaker flipped the ashes from his cigar and curled his lip scornfully.

The younger man changed his easy position and smiled.

"Of course," said he, "except in this single case. But because it is in my own single family; and because I have the written record of it—not relying upon 'old woman tales,' as you express it—I'm afraid I do rather put faith in that wretched curse, much as I would like not to."

"Then I say you are an ass. Any man would be an ass to believe such a lot of pure——"

"Tommy-rot?" suggested Thorndyke. "That is what you'd like to say if you were not so elegant, I know—so I'll say it for you. Yes, it looks very much like that, I know, but there's no help for it—I do believe in this particular curse, as I said—and no amount of ridicule can change it. I've tried to change my mind, but—well, perhaps, I haven't such small change with me," and he smiled again at the little pleasantry.

Carwin picked up the sword which lay upon the table, and which had brought up the whole subject, and looked at it curiously. It was a heavy old weapon, with jewelled handle and guard, and though the blade was rusty and nicked now, one could see it had been used in more than one deadly conflict, and had seen hard service and years of use in the dim past. It had belonged to a very ancient ancestor of Thorndyke's, and had been handed down to him, with the few other family relics that his father had managed to collect the last time he had been abroad. Beside the sword lay a yellow old paper, from which Thorndyke had been reading when Carwin, his best friend, dropped in for the evening.

"Then what I gather from your narrative," said the latter, after turning the weapon about in his hands a few moments, "is, that this is the very sword that did the deed. Am I right?"

"You are."

"And the story is, that away back in the dark ages, before people found that killing every man who crossed you was not the shortest way to heaven, one of your respected forefathers"—nodding to the row of dim old portraits which ran around the cosy room above the bookshelves—"owned this sword and was a knight. When the Crusades got to be the fashion, he was seized with a desire to wear a cross upon his shoulder—and also cross his feet when he was buried—and girding this self-same weapon about him, he gat himself unto the wars and whooping it up, as it were, racing off like the rest of humanity to fight with the Saracens and have a good time generally. And as he had a daughter—a young and pretty daughter—whom he could not take along with the rest of his impediments, he left her at home. How do I come on?"

"Finely; proceed," said Thorndyke, twirling the sword about his head and showing himself no mean fencer as he did so.

"Before leaving, this charmingly dull-witted individual—pardon me for calling him names, Thorndyke, but he *was* a chump—called all the servants up and made them a speech, in which he told of the great things he intended to do while away, and instructed them to be good boys and girls and mind their mistress's slightest wish, or prepare to hunt for other places when he returned from his little jaunt. Then he turned over the keys to her and left.

"When he got to the wars, he did some big fighting and distinguished himself, as you Thorndykes have a faculty of doing, and though he did not write home every week, as you do, he picked up a young Moor and shipped him back with letters and money for household expenses for the castle. The Moor was a slave, of course, but a handsome fellow—quiet, grave, and intelligent, and he made a great impression on everyone connected with the castle, the mistress included. He got there about Christmas time, and settled down as if he had intended coming all his life, but only just found the opportunity. For a while the other servants liked him; but as soon as they found he was fast becoming a favourite with the daughter of the house, their mistress, they veered round and took to despising him in good old English fashion, and proceeded to make things as hot for his Moorship as possible. Naturally enough, this had the effect of making the mistress like him all the more—no, I did *not* say all the Moor—and to show them she was the head of the house while papa was away, she took the Moor as her constant attendant. He waited upon her everywhere, excepting in her boudoir, and was with her constantly whenever she drove or walked about the grounds of that palatial pile.

"The Moor, being with her so much, very naturally, too, fell in love with her, and, as girls then were no more proof against the wiles of foreigners than they are in this matter-of-fact century, she succumbed to his dusky

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charms, and one morning, bright and early, they slipped across the great lawn and into the little chapel in the edge of the woods, where, by alternately brow-beating and cajoling the deaf and blind old parson, they were married. Am I not interesting, old man?"

"Very," said Thorndyke, laughing at his friend's frank manner: "there is added charm to the tale when 'tis told by you."

"Thank you. Well, they were good and married, and all went well——"

"Until a year had passed," put in Thorndyke.

"Until a year had passed. Then a little one was born—a tiny, light-skinned Moor, with blue eyes like its mother, and other features copied in miniature from its proud father. Of course there was a great stir when the youngster came, and the truth leaked out; but it was almost forgotten in the additional excitement caused by the return of my lady's father. An uninformed servant who had heard only half of the truth met him at the draw-bridge, and told him of the supposed-to-be-sad news of his daughter's marriage; and the old gentleman still with the blood of war in his nostrils and heeding nothing else but the fact, as he thought it was, that his name had been dragged in the dust by his child, dashed into the castle and pushed his way unceremoniously into her room, where she lay a sweet picture upon her bed, the child in her young arms, the sunlight streaming through the open window over her and the little one.

"Without a word, the half-crazed Crusader snatched the baby from its mother's arms and, swinging it about his head, he dashed it down to the courtyard below, where it lay dead almost before it had breathed the breath of life. Then, before the terrified stricken young mother could realise what had happened, the Moor appeared in the doorway, his dark face wreathed in a Christian-like smile, waiting to greet the father. With an imprecation, the Crusader sprang at him, and ere the Moor could draw and defend himself, he was run through by the sword that had been the death of many a Saracen before him, and lay weltering in his own blood at his father-in-law's feet. Then the girl-widow understood, and mad with grief and horror at the terrible deed, she pulled herself to her knees, and stretching her white arms out, her yellow hair glistening like burnished gold in the sunlight, she cursed the wretched man—cursed him as only a woman of that day and age could curse one. As the last awful word dropped from her lips, she sank back upon the bed unconscious, and a few hours after she was dead.

"From that hour the knight was a changed man. Serious and grave, with a haunted, frightened look upon his hitherto rugged countenance, he went about his estate, a broken, decrepit old man, hardly a shadow of his former self. A few years later he, too, died, but—but—I believe that is as far as I can go unaided, old man," concluded Carwin abruptly, turning to Thorndyke.

"Why—why—you leave off in the most interesting part, Carwin," said the other, resting from his exercise, which he had kept up in a lazy way, while the other talked. "The old knight died, to be sure, but have you forgotten how? Well, he got into trouble with another old fellow over some land, and the other chap fell upon him, unarmed though my forefather was, and slew him. As he fell, he turned his head and gazed on the wound, which was in his right side, and which he tore the clothing from, and after one glance he covered his eyes with one hand, shrieking out something about the Moor's head as he did so.

"There, in the shadow of his castle, he died a few moments later, and when the servants came running to find him—having heard his death screams—they knew the first curse had fallen, for from the gaping wound in their master's side a clot of blood had risen and taken the form of a head. And to their excited imagination, and from the colour of the dark fluid, it took upon itself the resemblance to the Moor whom the knight had slain as unmercifully as his enemy had just put an end to his life.

"Then they remembered the curse, and looked at each other frightened and awed. The old knight's only son lived to be thirty, when one day he wounded himself in the arm. He thought nothing of it until the Moor's head appeared, when he lost his nerve, too, and died the next day. And so for generations it ran, and never once has the eldest son of the eldest son died naught but a violent death, and his death has always been preceded by the appearance of this silent messenger, who has never given a false warning. That is the legend, and I'm sorry to say I sometimes feel as if my death would have to be a violent one to carry out the wretched curse. Being the eldest son of my father, it would end with me were I to die now."

"I trust so; but pray be a little more cheerful, and talk of something else besides dying just to accommodate this charming malediction. You are good for many years yet, and—be careful, Thorndyke!"

The other man was lunging at a heavy old bronze plaque which hung on the wall opposite him as Carwin spoke, and the sword bent and snapped back again at each thrust in a manner unpleasant to the latter's ears, as if foreboding some evil. Indeed, hardly had he spoken, when there was a sharp crack of breaking steel, and the point of the weapon whistled back from the wall. Thorndyke sprang aside, but too late; the rusty tip of the sword—broken only an inch or two from the point—had already reached him, and sank deep into his breast, just below the heart, and with a suppressed groan of pain he tumbled into his friend's outstretched arms.

Carrying him to the cushioned seat near the fireplace, Carwin tore the coat and shirt from about the wound, and, taking a firm grip upon the bit of steel, which just showed itself above the wound, he withdrew it slowly with his muscular fingers and hurled it into the glowing fire.

As he did so, Thorndyke opened his eyes and struggled to a sitting position, though the other strove to keep him upon the pillows.

"Oh, Heavens!" screamed the wounded man wildly. "Look, Carwin, look! It is—*it is the Moor's head!* And I—I——" He stopped, a shiver passed over his now damp body, and he swayed against the wall, and from there slid down to the couch, dead.

Carwin, with a curious light in his eyes, glanced about the room as an animal might, and then back at the Moor's head. Then he swept one hand down over his friend's bare breast and tore the clot from the wound, squeezing it viciously in his hand as he did so.

A moment passed during which there was no sound save the deep and nervous breathing of the man crouching beside the dead body of Thorndyke. Then slowly the head appeared again, and again he swept it off and crushed it in his hand.

A third time the head came, and Carwin, with staring eyes and chalk-like face, staggered to his feet. Then, with one mad look at the horrible thing, he rushed to the door, and, wrenching it open, screamed for help.

HARRY ROGERS.

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The Carriage will Call at Half-past Seven.

"BY Jove, old man, this is luck! I haven't seen you for a long time, though I met your ex-fidus Achates, Jack Olmsted, often enough. What is the trouble between you two, anyways?"

"Do you mean to say that you've never heard about the little unpleasantness, Dick?" asked Bob Ferrers.

"Never. Girl in the case, I suppose. Tell me about it, won't you? That is if you may. No—I've nothing to do. How could I be occupied here? For unparalleled loneliness, commend me to a summer hotel, where one is a stranger to all the other people, and the other people are all intimate."

"But you know some of the crowd here; in fact the leading characters of my story, Ellen Barton and Olmsted."

"Olmsted is well enough, but he's with the Thorpes all the time, and I don't like them! As for the little Barton girl, ugh! she'd take first prize in an ugly woman show."

"She isn't good-looking, I'll admit; but she's a good little soul, retiring, modest, and all that. My chief objection to her is that she is a Barton, and the Bartons are such uncommonly vulgar upstarts."

Personal gossip in public places is something worse than folly; it is a crime. While Dick Vane and Ferrers were discussing her affairs, Ellen Barton sat in a vine-clad summer-house within ten feet of them. Supposing that the men would walk on, she kept perfectly quiet; their words hurt her. The truth is apt to hurt. It was small comfort to be called a "good little soul." She knew that she was homely and her heart ached at the knowledge.

Pretty women cannot sympathise with her. They do not know what it is to be shunned by men, or accorded a word, now and then, too obviously from pity. They cannot realise that to the poor "wallflower," a ball-room is a place of humiliation and torture.

Had Ellen Barton pleased herself, she would have lived the life of a recluse; but her family could not understand her distaste for society. She was the only child, and to them her lack of beauty was not apparent. The Bartons lived in a small house, and dined in the front room of the basement. They had risen above horse-hair sofas, but they had succumbed to the evil influence of figured cotton-back plush.

Any and every form of entertainment was a "party" to them. They had heard of "five o'clock teas," but disapproved of such functions. "Tea at six o'clock, as we always have it, is early enough for me," Mr. Barton was wont to say. Ellen went to the church sociables with her father or her uncle. Other girls went with young men. Ellen eyed them enviously. The young men never invited her.

Every summer the Bartons spend four weeks at the seaside, and every summer, when they were ready to start, Mr. Barton made the same remark: "Now, Ellen, keep your eyes open. You might make a catch while you're away. Who knows!"

Ellen almost hated her uncle when he said that. She had heard it ever since she left school at sixteen, and now she was twenty-five.

At first she, too, had had vague ideas of someone who was to come and rescue her from the sociables and the other things she hated. Then to hope succeeded bitterness. She saw that men did not even dislike her; they were absolutely indifferent. She realised that the longing for love—that is the curse or the blessing of a woman's heart—was destined to be unfulfilled, and she hated other happier, prettier girls.

She was at the Brastead Hotel because her family liked the place. It was noisy and vulgar, but that they did not know. To them it was the abode of all that was fashionable and magnificent. Their names were copied from the hotel register into local papers, and Mrs. Barton bought numbers of these precious papers and sent some to friends: others she kept in a desk with her love-letters from Mr. Barton, Ellen's first shoes, and similar treasures.

Ellen sitting in the summer-house, had been thinking over these things. The conversation she overheard was but a crowning torture.

A convenient bench tempted Vane and Ferrers. They sat down, lit their cigars, and continued their criticism of the Bartons. It was too late to retreat, so Ellen was forced to listen.

"Those Bartons are worse than stupid," said Ferrers; "but, to do them justice, if they are insufferably aggressive, it's all for Ellen. How they push that girl forward! Throw her at a fellow's head, you know. That's why Olmsted and I are out."

"Great Scott! You don't mean to say you quarrelled about Ellen Barton?"

Vane laughed as he spoke, and to Ellen the laugh seemed infinitely worse than words. It was so scornful and contemptuous.

"Yes, it was about Ellen indirectly. You remember May Seymour's wedding? You know that everyone in our church knew it was to take place Tuesday, the 9th of February, long before the cards were out. Well, early in January Mrs. Barton wrote to Olmsted saying that she wished to see him about something particular. Of course he went, and what do you suppose the something was? She wanted him to escort Ellen to May's wedding. She told him she would engage a carriage which would call for him on the evening in question. How was that for an ambitious mamma? Jack is quite the bright, particular star of our church, and he's pretty well fixed financially. All the mothers run after him, but no one had ever been quite so open about it as Mrs. Barton. Jack was taken by surprise and could think of no excuse; and, anyway, he's an awfully good chap, so he said he'd be delighted to oblige her. Then he went out and kicked himself.

"The day Miss Seymour's invitations came out Jack received a second note from Mrs. Barton reminding him of his engagement to accompany Ellen. Poor boy, he wasn't likely to forget it! She added a postscript to say

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that a carriage had been ordered and that it would call for him at half-past seven.

"Jack wrote and thanked her.

"The Saturday preceding the ninth of February Jack met Mr. Barton in the city. You know old Barton, pompous and condescending to everyone, including his superiors. He shook hands with Jack. 'By-the-way,' said he, 'my wife has to dme to tell you, if I saw you, that a carriage has been ordered to take you and Ellen to Miss Seymour's wedding. It will call for you at half-past seven. Be punctual.'

"Sunday morning on his way to church Ellen herself stopped him. She seemed embarrassed. Finally she blurted out that Jack was very kind to act as her escort, and that if he did not wish to he need not. She said that she felt mortified that her mother should have asked him. Jack is a gentleman, so he told a lie. He said that, even if Mrs. Barton had not suggested it, he had intended asking her to go with him. The ugly duckling turned the colour of a boiled lobster, and thanked him so gratefully that he in turn thanked heaven that he had fibbed. Then Ellen went on:

"'Mamma told me to tell you that she'd send a carriage for you and then you're to come for me. The carriage will call at half-past seven.' Jack kept his face straight, but fled as soon as possible. After church he saw Ellen's uncle bearing down on him. Perhaps you've met her uncle? No? Well, he's a genial, jovial old person, illiterate and vulgar. He slapped Olmsted on the back and chuckled. He's particularly awful when he chuckles.

"'Well, my boy, going to take the little girl out, eh? Sly dog! Young folks will be young folks. Te!—he—he—he.' With one of his maddening chuckles he poked Jack in the ribs. 'There's a carriage been ordered,' said he; 'mind you behave now, you and the girl in the carriage. Te—he—he! No nonsense, eh? The carriage'll call at half-past seven.' Another poke in the ribs, another chuckle, and he waddled away.

"Poor Jack waited for the other Bartons to get away before he left the church. Mrs. Barton saw him, but was too far away to speak, so she motioned with her lips, and Jack knew what she was saying; 'Don't forget; the carriage will call at half-past seven.'

"When she had disappeared Jack turned to go, but he saw the sexton coming towards him. Ever see our sexton? He shuffles and talks in a whisper, and he'd make you think of funerals even if he didn't combine an undertaking establishment with the livery stables he runs. He seemed to have some weighty matter on his mind as he approached. He was more mysterious than usual. He looked round suspiciously to see if anyone was watching or listening. Then he put one finger on his lips and winked at Jack.

"'Perhaps you know why I want to see you, sir?' said he.

"'No, I don't,' said Jack.

"'Well, it's just this way, sir. A certain lady—to speak plainly, it's Mrs. Barton, sir—has engaged a carriage of me, for next Tuesday evening. She's going to send it for you at half-past seven. She feared she might not see you herself, so asked me to tell you. The carriage will call at half-past seven. Good-day, sir.'

"Jack felt like cursing the carriage, but he didn't. A lot of us fellows were in his room that evening, and he was so annoyed at the Barton tactics that he told us the whole story. He didn't realise that he was doing a foolish thing then, but he did the next Tuesday morning, for when he entered his office over a hundred post-cards lay on his desk. On every card he read the hated words: 'The carriage will call at half-past seven.'

"Then there were pictures of a couple, presumably Ellen and himself, getting into a carriage or getting out. One card was labelled 'The Result,' and there was again Ellen with her hand in Jack's, and her uncle Joe, as a fat cherub, hovering over them and saying: 'Bless you, my children.'

"There's nothing more to tell; except that he took Ellen to the wedding, and was as kind and attentive as possible to her. But he has avoided the Bartons ever since, and he'll kill the man that says to him: 'The carriage will call at half-past seven.'"

"But, Bob, in spite of the length of your story, you haven't explained why you and Olmsted quarreled," said Vane.

"Oh, it was a mere trifle. I sent the post-cards and he found it out."

"Is that all? The ending is commonplace. You led me to expect a tragic *dénoûment*. Hullo! it's almost dinner time. We may as well go back to the hotel."

The two men strolled away, quite unconscious that in the summer-house homely little Ellen Barton was crying as though her heart would break. So, this was the way men spoke of her! What hurt her most was to know that Olmsted had lied to her. It had always been a comfort to think that once one had actually wanted to take her out. Without realising it, she had made a hero of the only man that had ever shown her any attention. She felt that she could never again face him, or any of the men that knew the story. She had received the most crushing blow ever dealt her in her life, that had been made up of slights and humiliation. The intensity of shame overpowered her. She could not reason calmly. What was the use of living at all when there was nothing to live for? She wasn't merely lonely, she was stupid, she had no talents, nothing to atone for her lack of beauty. People ridiculed her. Ridicule is harder to bear than anything else. The world was harsh and cruel. She hated everyone, and most of all herself.

"I wonder if homely people go to heaven?" she murmured.

* * * * *

That night Dick Vane came up to Ferrers, in the smoking-room of the —— hotel.

"Say, old man, where's Olmsted?" said he; "I want to chaff him about that story you told me."

"For Heaven's sake, hold your infernal tongue! Haven't you heard? Miss Barton was in the summer-house this afternoon. She heard every word we said, and——"

"And what?" asked Vane, thoroughly shocked at the news.

"And someone saw her leave the summer-house and—and go towards the lake. And they have only just recovered her dead body."

Ferrers' voice rose as he spoke; his face was ghastly in its pallor. He paused a moment, then cried fiercely: "Confound you, is the *dénoûment* tragic enough, now?"

JULIA SCHLOMM.

This is a sad little story, isn't it? But cheer up! The second volume of PEARSON'S MAGAZINE *begins with the July number, published next Wednesday.*

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THE BRAIN GYMNASIUM.

No. 8.

TWO PRIZES OF £1 1s. EACH.

BELOW will be found the eighth batch of ten problems in the new series of "THE BRAIN GYMNASIUM." Two prizes of a Guinea each are offered weekly to those competitors who answer correctly the greatest number of these problems. Consolation prizes will be awarded at the discretion of the Editor.

RULES:

1. All solutions to be written on one sheet of paper.
2. Don't write the questions. Simply put the numbers and the answer against each.
3. Each set to contain the £100 coupon (found on second page of cover) for the current week.
4. All attempts to be in by Monday, June 29th.
5. Mark your envelope "Gymnasium, Number 8."

(71.) The initials read downwards and finals read upwards of the words defined below signify "violent."

1. A vehicle.
2. The two-toed sloth.
3. A violent tropical wind.
4. Repeat.
5. Paining.

(72.) The following is a cypher sentence. Transcribe it.

84m2 m4n0h8 62f4r2 h38 9210h, h2 pl1729 3n my h1n98 1 l1rg2, 419-f18h34n29 p47k20-b44k, b3993ng m2 147k 30 5p 1n9 k22p 30 81f2ly f4r h3m.

(73.) WORD SQUARES.

1. Belonging to you. A monster. To incite. River growth.
2. Mental power. A notion. Did lend. Behind time.

(74.) The following letters and words placed one on the other will form a diamond shape, the central letters spelling a word signifying "finished."

One of the first six letters of the alphabet, a species of deer, crystallised sugar, a university magistrate, young ducks, formed by work, covered in mud, a meadow, in "end."

(75.) If i=37½, e=2½, u=21½, z=59, t=47, what word on this page has the highest numerical value?

(76.) The British Footguards, numbering, say, 5,249 men armed with the Lee-Metford rifle are placed on a plain 1,500 yards long, at the other end of which are the Footguards of the German army, numbering, say, 6,464 men, armed with the Mannlicher rifle. The Germans advance to the attack, and at 1,300 yards both sides open fire, with the result that in the first three minutes the Germans lose 72 men and the British 57. During the next eight minutes the superior shooting of the British continues to tell, and 27 Germans fall every minute to 15 Britons. At 1,000 yards the proportion has increased by 16 British to 32 Germans per minute, and this average is maintained till the end. How long will it be before the Germans are annihilated, and how many British guardsmen, if any, will remain alive.

(77.) The following sentence when rearranged will spell a readable sentence.

He is ambiguously tender that speaks up his language in bashful confidences, not when a precise man would draw his own word he hints, to the preoccupied subject every preoccupation of will the wherewith in assimilates he spoken enters

(78.) My first is to encircle.
My second is an adjective.
My third is a "turn."
My whole is "indirect."

(79.) If you paid 6d. for every word of eight letters and over on this page, what is the total amount you would pay?

(80.) How many words are there on this page? Do not count figures or punctuation marks.

RESULT OF BRAIN GYMNASIUM COMPETITION.—No. 5.

MOST of the competitors in this competition stumbled over the mathematical problem No. 44, while many who sent this in correctly, forwarded a very feeble anagram for No. 48. The work of adjudicating has therefore been an exceptionally delicate one. The result arrived at awards one of the guineas to Miss Margaret Hellfarth, Bower Lodge, Pyrland Road, Richmond, and the other to Mr. Geo. Humphreys, 19, Colville Street, Nottingham.

Consolation prizes in the form of pencil-cases have been sent to the competitors whose names appears below.

Miss D. Gordon, The Courtyard, Altham; Mrs. Somerville, 14, Musard Road, W.; S. T. Green, Well Close House, Fenton, Staffordshire; T. G. Ushers, Baltinglass, co. Wicklow; Miss S. T. Jones, 37, Aberfeldy Street, Poplar, E.; Miss G. Goldsmith, 56, Campbell Road, Southsea; T. W. Harrison, 27, Queen Street, North Ormesby, Middlesbrough; Mrs. M. E. Mennie, 99, Queen Street, Peterhead; R Trail Hill, 3, Merchant Street, Peterhead; T. Mason, Hawkhead Terrace, 31, Seedhill Road, Paisley; H. St. George, 37, Lawrence Road, Southsea; A. H. Hamilton, 43, Dalmeney Road, Tufnell Park; C. B. Keston, 11, Queen's Road, Bayswater, W.; B. M. Perks, 97, Burlington Street, Greenheys, Manchester; C. Willoughby, 48, Benedict Street, Stanley Road, Bootle; J. Tanner, 74, Hampton Park, Bristol; W. A. Breffitt, 139, Duke Street, Brooks Bar, Manchester; G. Russell, 68, Strahan Road, Bow; E. Friend, Eastern Road, Romford; A. James, Gorringe Park, Mitcham, Surrey; W. C. Caird, 12, Franklin Street, South Tottenham; F. P. Whiteside, 24, Bowden Street, Glodwick, Oldham; W. H. Page, H.M.S. *Hero*, Portsmouth; Mrs. A. Sellurs, 69, Clinton Road, Mile End Road, E.; C. Holligan, Ashton House, Hampton Hill, Middlesex; Miss A. Vincent, 16, Crowhurst Road, Brixton, S.W.; W. H. Deeble, 25, Arwenack Street, Falmouth; P. Sweeney, 124, Hartnup Street, Anfield, Liverpool; W. S. Cool, 28, Thirsk Road, Lavender Hill; Miss L. M. Searle, Woodside Court, Croydon; A. Dawson, Sunny Bank, Frodsham, Cheshire; Miss M. Joseph, 88, Hyde Park Mansions, N.W.; J. Rawling, 3, Ingram Street, Huntingdon; J. H. Kidd, "Maulden," Heaton Mersey, near Manchester; A. H. Barlow, 115, Walmer Road, Notting Hill, W.; J. Manby, 1, Upper Bow, Edinburgh; Miss B. Wood, Bower Lodge, Pyrland Road, Richmond.

KEY TO NO. 5 COMPETITION.

KEY No. 41.—Inspection.

KEY No. 42.—Excellent.

KEY No. 43.—There are several words value 75, such as paragraph, properties, appears, prepaid, approach, etc., all of which have been counted correct.

KEY No. 44.—16½½ miles.

KEY No. 45.

R	E	A	P.
E	L	S	E.
A	S	P	S.
P	E	S	T.

KEY No. 46.

F	lounde	R	P icaroo N
O	bsolet	E	L obeli A
L	ongbo	W	A nagra M
L	ibrett	O	C ingales E

KEY No. 47.—He scanned the yawl, as he stood there, and his keen and practised eye took in and fully appreciated the beauty of her lines.

KEY No. 48.—The following anagrams, sent in answer to this problem, are above the average:

Bag the dread spy. Spread thy badge. G. B. Hay's departed.

KEY No. 49.—At the commencement a physical impression was sufficient to dissipate this hallucination. Without attracting attention I arose and went to my chamber. A dash of cold water on the forehead restored calm. The spectre disappeared and I returned smiling.

KEY No. 50.—Examination.

RESULT OF PICTURE PUZZLE COMPETITION.—No. 7.

09	5	56	2	8	41	35	6
22	18	45	19	71	61	9	50
16	46	30	21	28	43	26	49
62	64	33	7	78	40	38	17
12	69	57	36	3	74	58	79
67	55	27	23	88	13	53	48
47	61	99	37	24	73	54	70
15	94	89	72	42	25	20	87
32	01	78	76	18	85	14	69
4	83	29	83	11	68	31	77
34	99	1	98	62	08	82	44

No competitor succeeded in correctly putting together all the squares in this puzzle picture. The £10 prize has therefore been divided between the two competitors who were only one square wrong, Mr. J. Hughes, 15, Royal Name Place, New Cross, and Miss A. Beer, 2, Keppel Terrace, Stoke, Devonport, to each of whom a cheque of £5 has been sent. Consolation prizes have been sent to the following:

G. D. Taylor, 23, Ernest Street, Rhyl; Miss B. Keeley, "Eastgate," Ashford Road, Maidstone; J. Hughes, 15, Royal Naval Place, New Cross; A. Hook, 9, Canterbury Place, Lambeth Road; J. A. Rigg, 14, Newport Road, Manningham, Bradford; W. Kay, junr., 56, Lady Lawson Street, Edinburgh; Miss Cox, 2, Claremont Villas, Tudor Road, Norbiton; J. T. Roberts, 3, Sand Street, Pwllheli, North Wales; T. N. Sheehan, Dining Rooms, High Street, Tunbridge Wells; Arthur Hook, 9, Canterbury Place, Lambeth Road, S.E.

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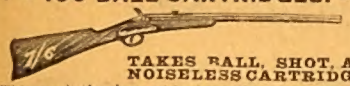
7/6 SALOON GUN WITH 100 BALL CARTRIDGES. 7/6



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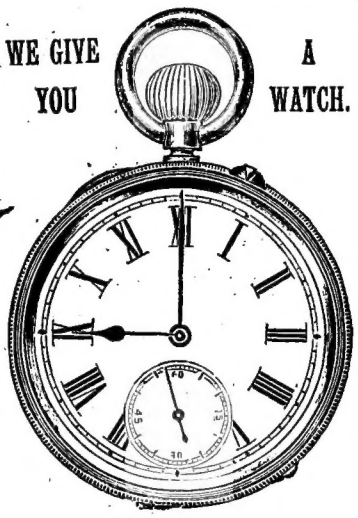

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